SAGE Studies on India's North East

Blisters on their Feet

Tales of Internally Displaced Persons in India's North East

Edited by

Samir Kumar Das

ICSSR-NERC

Blisters on their Feet

To my parents and others
who live through displacement and rebuild their lives

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SAGE
Los Angeles • London • New Delhi • Singapore
www.sagepublications.com

First published in 2008 by

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B1/I-1, Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044, India
www.sagepub.in

SAGE Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320, USA

SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP, United Kingdom

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd
33 Pekin Street
#02-01 Far East Square
Singapore 048763

Published by Vivek Mehra for SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, typeset in 10/13 pt Galiard by Star Compugraphics Private Limited, Delhi and printed at Chaman Enterprises, New Delhi.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Blisters on their feet: tales of internally displaced persons in India's
North East/edited by Samir Kumar Das.
p. cm.
Includes index.
1. Internally displaced persons—India, Northeastern—Social conditions.
2. Internally displaced persons—Government policy—India, Northeastern. 3.
Social conflict—India, Northeastern. 4. Economic development—India,
Northeastern. I. Das, Samir Kumar, 1961–

HV640.4.I4B55 362.870954′1—dc22 2008 2008004282

ISBN: 978-0-7619-3653-4 (HB) 978-81-7829-819-1 (India-HB)

The SAGE Team: Sugata Ghosh, Meena Chakravorty, Vijaya Ramachandran and Trinankur Banerjee

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Preface

This book grows primarily out of the proceedings of four workshops organized by the Indian Council of Social Science Research–North Eastern Regional Centre (ICSSR–NERC) in as many places of India's North East at different times during the last few years. In addition, I have requested some of my colleagues to write for us on areas and themes that have remained uncovered by the series of workshops mentioned earlier. Its main objective is to weave and tell the tales of people who have been constantly on the move and hence have blisters on their feet. I acknowledge my indebtedness to Somi for reminding me of the famous Phil Collins number on the homeless from which I have generously borrowed the phrase—'blisters on the feet'—that forms part of the book's title. I thank Indian Council of Social Science Research–North Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong—particularly, my dear friend Dr C. J. Thomas—for having reposed faith in my ability to edit the book. The individual authors will be responsible for the views they have expressed in their respective writings. Neither the ICSSR–NERC nor the editor necessarily takes any responsibility for the views expressed by them.

The book consists mainly—though not exclusively—of case studies and on occasions, more than one study on the same case and these should not be construed as full-fledged chapters. Case studies are organized state-wise and each of the states constituting in turn a section each is organized alphabetically. The ordering of sections is no reflection of severity of the problem. The concluding section is entitled 'The North East' for it seeks to derive some of the implications of these case studies and place them in a wider comparative framework.

I shall feel rewarded if this book comes to any help to the students, scholars and researchers, human rights activists and lawyers and most importantly, any socially concerned person.

Samir Kumar Das

Introduction

Samir Kumar Das

In one of the recently held workshops on the issue of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in India's North East, a young researcher was literally snubbed and humiliated for having taken her empirical researches obsessively and neglecting thereby what some of the elderly scholars sermonized as the imperative of building theory in this field. This, to my mind, aptly sums up the conundrum that seems to characterize whatever little and sporadic research we have in the field under review. While concern for the field's heavily under-theorized nature can hardly be exaggerated, the elders' expectations of some ready-made theorizations is not only premature but also misplaced. This book does not claim to address the problem of under-theorization per se, for, the book as we have said in the Preface, is meant to be a compendium of case studies—on some occasions, studies conducted by two or more researchers in the same case[1]—drawn from as many as four states of the region worst affected by the scourge of population displacement. Nor does it make a plea for waiting till we gather and accumulate data–good enough to warrant any future theorization. Although there is no denying that there is an acute paucity of information and data in the field under review, we argue that social theories seldom develop in this way. Theories we develop are derived from the ongoing discourses that operate and circulate in the larger society and the so-called inadequacy of theories to my mind will have to be explained with reference to these discourses that make certain theoretical developments and their statements possible and accordingly privilege

them, while at the same time censoring and silencing many others. If one is disappointed for having found no theoretical paper worth its name in a workshop like the one I have just referred to, one cannot avoid the responsibility of going deep into what leads to this sorry state of under-theorization in the first place and how we can probably overcome the crisis.

This book seeks to highlight these otherwise censored and *silenced aspects* by way of drawing the implications of the assorted case studies in this volume, and by doing so bring them to the centre of any future theoretical inquiry into the society and politics of the region. None of the case studies can be considered a full-fledged paper or a self-contained chapter, so to say. The value of the case studies included in this book will have to be judged in terms of the low-key, unstated or at times understated theoretical insights they throw on our understanding of the region. Critical social theories are not built in a vacuum so you can ask for them in workshops and seminars at the drop of a hat. After all, Marx too formulated his theory only by making a sustained critique of the bourgeois understanding of political economy, long before he became known for his theory, and the critical insights he obtained in the course of his act of constant critiquing of his predecessors' writings subsequently went into the formulation of his theory. An appreciation of the critical nature of theory first of all entails a recovery of the critical theoretical insights implicit in the case studies—critical insights that cannot be explained and made sense of with the help of the existing stock of theories and discourses. It will be evident that the case studies assembled in this book stand in a somewhat uncomfortable relationship to the already existing theories that have been tested in course of our attempts at coming to terms with the society and politics of the region, and ideally a book of this nature should soon be followed up by a companion volume that proposes to concentrate on the task of recovering these insights and articulating them into a body of theory. This book however does not make such a claim, nor has any theoretical pretensions and hence will only add to the disappointment and consternation of a section of senior and elderly scholars who think that they have a right to expectations of theory from us.

TOWARDS A DISCOURSE SHIFT

About a couple of years back, a highly respected scholar from the North East—well-known for her feminist commitment—wanted her name to be taken off the complimentary mailing list of a journal that makes no bones about its commitment to the victims of forced migration. Her long letter obviously meant for explaining why she had taken this hard decision first of all emphasized that in a region like the North East where the locals face the perennial threat of being outnumbered by the migrants whether from outside India or not and of losing their language and culture to them, such a journal has hardly any relevance and readership. Her letter left us with the impression that she had to take the decision against her will (for she seemed to be sensitive to the cause of hapless migrants) and had to succumb to the pressure of an otherwise highly xenophobic population. The letter points to the larger helplessness and insecurity faced by a socially sensitive person like her who finds it difficult—if not impossible—to voice what looks like, her essentially individual commitment *in public*. She does not want to be publicly identified as the recipient of a journal that goes against the all-pervasive public mood and opinion. She feels thoroughly embarrassed and has to hide her sensitivities and commitments for fear of larger public outrage. It is difficult to ascertain whether she was trying to be polite to the editor by passing the buck onto 'public pressure', which is understandable or she was feeling genuinely insecure and helpless in the face of a xenophobic population and finding it difficult to voice her individual commitments in public. A generous take on her letter however gives credence to the first interpretation. It reflects the dilemma of Tocqueville, who in his famous *Democracy in America* (2000: 250) singled out the principle of justice as the 'highest limitation' on the democratic rule of the majority. The principle of justice remaining unuttered for fear of repression and retaliation from the majority of the public has hardly been rare in the region's history.

I propose to read the letter not so much as an individual's attempt albeit unsuccessful at wriggling out of the conundrum underlined above, but as an important social document that also points to the complex modalities of articulation of public discourse in the region.

The nature of the discourse fixes the limits of what we can say and perhaps disallows us from saying what cannot be said and shared in public. The relevance and readership of our utterances are predicated on the particular articulation of the public discourse. It is important that researches are initiated in this direction sooner rather than later. What the scholar in her letter identifies as 'public pressure' has its origins in a discourse that was largely articulated in course of the Assam movement (1979–85). The movement, as we know, is widely accepted as the classical paradigm of 'anti-foreigners' upsurge' that started sending its shockwaves throughout the region precisely since the late 1980s. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta—the then President of the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) that spearheaded the six-year long movement—eloquently sums it up in the very title of his celebrated book as *The Tussle between the Citizens and Foreigners in Assam* (Mahanta 1986). While there is no denying that the movement was mainly—though not exclusively—targeted against the 'foreigners', mostly Bangladeshi immigrants 'illegally' settled in Assam, there was nevertheless significant public outcry also against the Assamese being evicted from their homes. This part is seldom highlighted in most run-of-the-mill writings on the movement. The state was accused of being more interested in evicting the Assamese occupants than the 'Bangladeshi' ones in the name of clearing public lands (like roads, mines, grazing reserves, forests, etc.). Thus, the Assamese have reportedly expressed their resentments against the state's discriminatory stance even in the city of Guwahati (*Dainik Asom* 5 May 1982). Both these responses—whether of driving out the 'illegal' settlers or of protesting against the Assamese being driven away from their homes essentially arise from the same anxiety of protecting and preserving the Assamese as a community—their language, culture and homeland. What is often lost sight of is that this discourse articulated in course of the Assam movement makes an implicit distinction between two groups—both victims of forced displacement—the Assamese on the verge of being displaced in the wake of alarming influx or forcibly evicted from their homes by the state and the settlers who have migrated to India more often than not, only after being forcibly driven out from their homes in their own country by a different state. Even some of the very

radical writings are informed by such a distinction. Gail Omvedt, for instance, observes:

> This is not because Bengalis (the Bengali immigrants, emphasis mine) are an oppressor nation; rather it has happened because of the particular form of oppression Bengalis have suffered from. But that does not make the danger any less real to the Assamese (1989: 6).

The hierarchy of victims based on their respective ethnic identifications is implicit yet pervasive in the discourse mentioned above and produces a kind of political practice in which one group of victims is pitted against another and vice versa. Assam's 'anti-foreigners' upsurge' viewed in this light is an internal fight amongst the victims of displacement—whether real or potential. It is a movement in which community identifications takes precedence over victimhood per se. That you are displaced is not a good enough reason to assert your right against it or to relief and rehabilitation. The ethnic identification of the victim is important in providing legitimacy to her claim to right. In other words, displacement as a phenomenon could not serve as a thread binding the victims together irrespective of the groups and communities they belonged to.

The refugee-IDP binary is nowhere more sharply illustrated than in the studies of Panigrahi and K.O. Sebastian in the context of Arunachal Pradesh. Both of them point out how the influx of refugees displaced by the inundation of their homes and cultivable lands by the commissioning of the Kaptai Dam in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)—now in Bangladesh—during the early 1960s and their rising population have posed a potential threat of displacement to the comparatively small number of autochthones particularly of Changlang district.

The Assam movement was marked by an ambiguity. While in principle, the movement was directed against the 'illegally' settled 'foreigners' (*bideshi*s) who as per the Constitution and law of the land have no right to be in India, the leaders of the movement had at times found it extremely difficult to justify the attacks on victims who might have been outsiders (*bahiragat*s)—but migrating from other parts of India and settled in Assam for generations so much so that in 1980, the Asom Sahitya Sabha (Assam Literary Society), one

of the principal organizations providing much of the intellectual leadership to the movement, had to issue a communiqué announcing the change of the neologism from 'outsiders' to 'foreigners' on the simple ground that all outsiders are not foreigners. The violence that leads to eviction and displacement of 'citizens' within a country, produces according to the legal jargon IDPs, not refugees. International Law of course makes a distinction between the IDPs and the refugees: Refugees are those who cross international borders while IDPs lose their homes but remain within the country and therefore live under the sovereign jurisdiction of the same state. Given this ambiguity, it will be more apt to brand the displaced persons during the Assam movement as a curious mixture of the refugees and the IDPs. The mixed nature of displacement calls for a review of the legal regime that is perched on the presumption that the refugees and the IDPs are two clearly distinguishable categories. The discourse articulated in course of the Assam movement makes it imperative on our part to 'detect, disenfranchise and deport' the immigrants settled 'illegally' in Assam; it does not simultaneously make deliberate displacement of Indian citizens migrating from outside the boundaries of the state of Assam an imperative necessity for the protection and preservation of the Assamese language and culture on the ground that the freedom to move and settle in any part of the country has been guaranteed by the Constitution as one of the fundamental rights. That the discourse is predicated on such a distinction does not mean that violations have not taken place at all in this regard.

If the Assam movement provides the classical paradigm of 'anti-foreigners upsurge', it was by all accounts largely successful in welding diverse sections of people together under a reasonably broad umbrella of the 'Assamese' community in their six-year long tussle against the 'foreigners'. It was only after the violence of 1983 that the broad-based fraternity of the Assamese community showed signs of cracks and fissure. Makiko Kimura's case study on election violence in Assam in 1983 tells us the story of gradual collapse of the in consensus. The tension between the state AASU leadership and the ethnic Lalungs who were accused of being perpetrators of violence against the immigrant Muslims of Nellie—a small hamlet

that witnessed the worst orgy of violence in February 1983—was brewing since that time. While this never culminated in any direct Assamese-Lalung hostility of sorts, it nevertheless brought the question of inter-group equilibrium *within* the parameters of a broadly defined Assamese community to a flashpoint. The Bodos were the first to fall apart and were closely followed by others as well. The collapse of larger ethnic and community formations all over the North East, as I argue, coincided with not only interethnic violence and displacement but a new and unprecedented concern for the IDPs. Bhaumik's study seeks to portray the shift by describing both internal displacement and the concern for IDPs as a 'recent phenomenon'.

Ethnic violence that ensued in the region with a large section of Bodos asserting their identity and homeland autonomous from those of the Assamese, added a significant dimension to the issue of displacement: It has shifted the focus from the 'illegal' settlers whom we loosely term as 'refugees' in popular parlance, to the IDPs. If the Assam movement is regarded as a classical paradigm of 'anti-foreigners' upsurge', the Bodo movement should be regarded as the classical paradigm of upsurge against the non-Bodo outsiders who might have been 'Indian citizens'. At least three studies (10 to 12) directly deal with the case of displacement as a result of the Bodoland movement. Even as late as 2000, I argued in favour of including Refugee Studies as part of the larger Social Science agenda in the region (Das 2000b: 21–25). The present resurgence of researches on internal displacement in the region is to my mind a corollary to the displacement that was taking place during the Bodo movement.

In many cases, ethnic clashes (like the Naga-Kuki clashes in 1993–97 or the Karbi-Dimasa clashes in 2005.) do not actually have to take place in order to trigger off displacement. The fear of an imminent conflict is enough to displace people. The Naga-Meitei conflict has never taken place for that matter. Yet in the highly surcharged atmosphere of anti-ceasefire extension agitation in Manipur, many Nagas reportedly felt it imperative to leave the valley and settle themselves in Naga-inhabited areas of the hills including the present Indian state of Nagaland. One of her Naga respondents for example told Pong Deila—a Naga herself—that he was constantly reminded

by the Meiteis that 'Manipur is a holy land for the Meiteis' (Deila 2006 mimeo). As a report prepared by the Naga Peoples' Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) echoes:

> The continued taunting, verbal threats, physical intimidation even to the extent of torture and physical elimination from the Imphal valley based Meitei militants in the recent years have promoted insecurities and threatened communal flare-ups (NPMHR nd. mimeo).

Yet, it will be significant to note that popular responses in the region are characterized by a paradox: While 'refugees' are unwelcome to our land, we do not want to be displaced ourselves. Refugee-hood or displacement is bad as long as it affects us. It is not so as long as it does not affect us. The popular concern for displaced persons in the North East emerged ironically from out of a concern from the purview of one's collective self and community supposedly facing some sort of danger—whether of immigration or as we will see, of environmental disaster induced by our essentially flawed policies of development. It did not grow out of a concern for the displaced persons per se. The concern does not mark any shift in the discourse. It continues to be marked by the self-same preponderance of ethnicity and ethnic community. The issue of displacement will still take some time to emerge as an autonomous discourse in the region.

The case studies included in this volume seek to make a departure from this otherwise pervasive popular concern—by viewing displacement as an issue of human rights. While displacement entails some kind of human rights violation, the displaced persons irrespective of their ethnicities are entitled to certain rights. Viewing them as rights-bearing entities implies that we *ab initio* recognize them as human beings. The ethnic other as we know is never accorded with this recognition and hence does not deserve the human rights that pertain only to the human beings (Das 2005). The ethnic other is dehumanized in a way that the stories of brutal and gory killings of the members of another community do not evoke any sympathy from us. Unless we bring this recognition to bear on our concern, popular concerns for displacement and IDPs—strong and pervasive they may be—may eventually turn out to be a stumbling block to its emergence as an autonomous human rights discourse.

Any theorization presupposes that we shift the terms of our discourse (Banerjee et al. 2005: 21–26). The case studies albeit covertly, propose to set aright the terms and pave the way to newer theorizations. What the individual feminist could not achieve as an individual, we seek to do as a collective and I wish we grow both in number and in our sensitivity, for, all our contributors vindicate that displacement per se is unethical and involves violation of human rights and displaced persons irrespective of their ethnicities and group identities form a community of their own and is entitled to certain rights before, during and after displacement. Wherever displacement is avoidable, they even have the right against displacement.[2] Not all who have blisters on their feet automatically constitute a community in the North East.

HOME, HOMELAND, TERRITORIALITY

Displacement, according to the UN Guiding Principles (1998), is measured narrowly with reference to that from home or the places of habitual residence. Displacement from home or places of habitual residence is often the culmination of a long process of depletion and erosion of critical life-bearing resources, displacement from work-place, loss of livelihood and slow submergence of cultivable land as a result of riverbank erosion. The comprehensive study made by Fernandes and Barbora treats the problem of the region in a larger comparative perspective and establishes a direct correlation between gradual loss of livelihood and consequent population displacement. They plead for making the people who migrate as a result of 'deterioration of conditions of life' a separate category of displaced persons. This definition clearly turns a blind eye to these early warning signals and wakes up to the problem only when it is too late and a person or a group of persons is actually forced to leave their homes. Besides, its objective is not to secure the right against displacement per se—but only the right against avoidable displacement. Neither the International Law nor the Constitution of India views one's right to home as 'fundamental' and therefore a non-derogable right. Whatever care and protection the victims are eligible for in the eye of

the law are in the nature of compensating them for the loss that the loss of home has inflicted on them. Justice therefore is coeval with the question of relief and rehabilitation given to them as a matter of compensation. Home in South Asia is much more than what can probably be compensated for: it means memories, ambiences, neighbours, members of the joint family and the clan, trees and cattle, one's community, moral beliefs and convictions, one's very existence and much more. One is what one is by virtue of living at home where one actually lives. Loss of home is sure exile for one who has to suffer it. Much of the critical literature on loss of home points to the split that it causes to the displaced—between what one imagines as one's past and one's present and how one fails to come to terms with it throughout one's life (Said 2000). Home, as our case studies argue, is incomplete without homeland. One must keep in mind that the critical Indo-Anglian writings too are predicated on the double experience of losing one's home and homeland at the same time. Home and homeland are so organically connected that their connection can hardly be severed. Debbarma's narrative of losing his home—personal and touching as it is—is also intricately laced with another faintly expressed narrative of gradually losing the homeland, thanks to the population 'invasion' from outside and the reduction of the tribals into a powerless minority in Tripura.

Is the guarantee of homeland then the only means of securing the right to home in the North East? An affirmative answer to this question only confirms our hypothesis of ethnic preponderance. International Law too is gradually becoming sensitive to the issue of recognizing homeland as a right for those who are not represented by the existing order of nation-states. The founding assumption of this discourse is: Right to home is impossible without creating a homeland. K. Shethajit, drawing his case from Manipur, contests this assumption and argues that only the recognition of the composite and inter-lived nature of the space of Manipur and not anyone's right to exclusive homeland can secure one's right to home. For he, like many others in this volume, attributes displacement to the stridency of the claim to exclusive homeland that seeks to cleanse the proposed area of others who do not belong to the community. While the Bodo case, as I have argued, serves as the point of departure, our studies

in Arunachal Pradesh (3 to 5), Manipur (14 to 19) and Tripura (25) point out—of course agonizingly—how the dream of creating ethnic homelands has been responsible for the spiralling of violence and displacement in the areas in question. In a region, which is as ethnically diverse as the North East, it is impossible to create an ethnically homogeneous homeland, for the so-called majorities are haunted by the nagging fear of being outnumbered by others, thanks to the migrations both from within the international borders and without and although the ethnic minorities are minorities numerically, they hate to be socially and politically treated as minorities. The stridency of the majorities is only matched by the growing stridency of the minorities. Political and administrative engineering is bound to fail us; it is bound to fall short of the way people migrate and settle in the era of globalization.

This, as our evidences point out, has proven to be a fatal and losing game for all—everyone has to bear the brunt of violence and displacement—including those who have sought to translate this dream into reality by grotesquely turning the democratic logic of majority on its head. Many Bodos have been displaced and with a rising militancy of the Cobra Force of the Santhals and many Muslim organizations including Muslim Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA), any cleansing operation is unlikely to be a one-sided affair. If they ever become successful in creating a homeland of their own, there will be a homeland without a home. Given the stridency of the Santhal and Muslim militant groups, many Bodos may be deprived of their homes if they decide to attack them. Formation of the Bodo Territorial Council is a tribute to the recognition of the shared nature of space. Both Kukis and Nagas have lost their homes in the Kuki-Naga conflicts of the early 1990s as have the Dimasas and Karbis in the first five years of the new millennium. Interestingly, Uttam Bathari—himself a Dimasa whose family had to suffer displacement induced by the violence perpetrated by the Karbi militant organization—has been equally sensitive to the cause of the displaced Karbis.[3] The signs of this new consciousness that transcends ethnic and community lines and inspires one to view the IDPs as persons whose rights have been transgressed irrespective of their ethnicity are slowly becoming visible in the region. If home without homeland is

impossible, homeland without home is not only possible but going to be a distinct possibility in the near future.

An imaginary homeland implies mimicry of state territoriality in more than one sense. As any modern state organizes the people living within a territorially defined space into a nation, the ethnic community seeks to homogenize the people by way of getting rid of what it considers as its other. Its claim to homeland is usually accompanied by an ethnic cleansing project. Insofar as homeland gets organized, it takes precedence over individual claims to home. When large sections of people in Tripura are displaced as a result of barbed wire fencing along the Indo-Bangladesh border in the interest of national security, it does not matter whether you as an individual or as a reasonably large section lose your homestead or cultivable land; it is important that you make way in the interest of the nation. Any protest against this can only be voiced at the risk of being anti-national.[4] Similarly, the project of organizing ethnic homelands necessarily privileges homeland over home. People living outside their homelands are always encouraged or even coerced to come back and resettle themselves in what is considered as the homeland. Space in the North East for all practical purposes has been ethnically homogenized particularly during the last couple of decades—with mixed areas increasingly becoming a rarity. The people have shifted themselves in keeping with the requirements of these imaginary homelands not always involuntarily—whether the state has recognized them or not. The correspondence of home with homeland has ironically led to a considerable reshuffling and displacement of population.

IDPs are a product of the accretion of boundaries. R. K. Ranjan's case study of the Tarao chief in Manipur excommunicating his brother in the recent past therefore is not an example of displacement. This according to him is a common practice and has acquired a ritualistic significance for the brother settles himself within the boundaries of the imagined homeland and finally reunites with the chief—thanks to the mediation of a common friend. The brother is not in distress either. Even such mediation interestingly is defined by the existing body of rites.

IDPs are displaced *internally* only when we view them from within the territorially defined borders of the nation-state. But viewed from within the boundaries of imaginary homelands—which are as sharply defined and meticulously maintained as territorial borders of our nation-state—it does not matter whether those who get displaced are IDPs or refugees. They will be thrown outside the homeland that is not their own. The travails of the Reangs (Brus) are a case in point. They have to migrate continuously between Tripura and Mizoram. If they cannot claim a homeland of their own, IDPs become 'refugees'—unwelcome wherever they go within the North East. Their Indian citizenship is hardly of any help to them. They have no way to claim their internality to any place. I will not be surprised if in the near future we see the IDPs demanding a separate homeland of their own in the North East. IDPs may themselves find a solution to their problem in the same *imaginaire* of homeland that has displaced them. In a region like the North East, the distinction between the IDPs and the refugees always hangs by a thread. Bhaumik's study draws our attention to what it terms as 'the vast grey area' that exists in the North East between the transborder refugees and the internally displaced persons.

In many cases, constituent states and state administrations play a role if not directly, at least by making some omissions that allow for violence against the minorities and immigrants. The case study made by Mazumder and Bhattacharjee on the Reangs of Hailakandi (Assam) shows how the displaced persons constantly shuttle between the states of Mizoram and Assam. Often the states have, in the perception of the afflicted victims, failed singularly in providing security to them. Besides attacks on government-run relief camps (to which we will come a little later), many of the victims of Urabari, Tripura, as Basu Majumder points out, want to return to their homes only on condition that pickets of Tripura State Rifles (TSR) are posted in the villages. It seems that their return will never mean restoration of the status quo *ante bellum* that existed prior to the outbreak of violence. A village without any recorded history of conflict limps back to normalcy, but a normalcy that gets redefined with the posting of police pickets. I wish some studies are conducted on

the modalities through which social relations get redefined after the return of the displaced persons.

Sometimes, some otherwise well-meaning government policies couched in the rhetoric of welfare have been responsible for displacement. Dutta and Showren take a critical view of the Government Regulation of 1964 that aimed at liberating the Sulungs (Puroiks) of Arunachal Pradesh by way of buying them from their masters against Rs 500 each. Many of the Sulungs set loose from their masters did not know what to do and were displaced in the absence of any effective alternative. A survey of 1996 still identified a number of bonded labour amongst the Sulungs 'sandwiched between liberation and rehabilitation'.

CONFLICT FORMATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Much of the controversy centering on the IDPs of the North East revolves around the question of legitimacy of their settlement in places wherefrom they have been displaced and therefore the rightfulness of their claim to home. History is conveniently invoked to buttress or discard one's claim to settlement and home. Most of whatever is available in the form of writings on the IDPs in the region, to my mind unnecessarily gets into the controversy engaged in determining the legitimacy, rightfulness or historicity of such claims and counterclaims. The authors seem more comfortable in their role as self-appointed adjudicators of the contentious claims. Thus they unknowingly stumble on the same ethnicist hypothesis. But there is no universally agreed, meta-ethnic way of determining such rightfulness (see Das 2004). Again, habitual residence does not have to be rightful by universal standards. The Guiding Principles interestingly did not raise the issue of rightfulness. One who has been habitually residing on the public sidewalk considers it as one's rightful home. For once, none of the contributors here has trodden this otherwise beaten path.

In a region where ethnicity continues to hold the key to home and displacement, it is interesting first of all to understand the dynamics of interethnic conflicts and see how displacement is inextricably

connected with them. Much of what has been written on ethnic conflicts in the region tells us an incredibly well-rounded story: Violence is attributed to the conflict between two perennially hostile communities making their rivaling claims to the same tract of land and displacement is a result of this conflict. While displacement is often used as a strategy of cleansing others, the examples of people feeling unsafe and fleeing from conflict zones are never very infrequent. It tells us the story of two fully formed communities laying competing claims over land in a region where land is accorded a ritualistic value and is coterminous with a community's identity and most importantly, justifying the claims with two mutually incompatible value systems. A recent statement of this story is available in Varshney's paper (2005) that argues that ethnic conflicts usually evolve from being conflicts over self-justifying values into highly strategic conflicts over resources. Our case studies however corroborate the opposite of this hypothesis.

On the one hand, conflicts should be regarded as the modes of formation of communities. The formation of communities does not precede the emergence of conflicts. It is through the conflicts that communities get organized and transformed. The accounts of Ksh. Bimola Devi and S. Mangi Singh on the Manipur hills show how the 'strategic' use of violence by some 'criminal' elements gradually led to the involvement of whole communities and thus triggered off a conflict over values. We propose to view conflict—not as a product but as a process of community formation. On the other hand, conflicts take place usually on the peripheries of communities whose ethnic affiliations remain uncertain or even contested. K. Gailangam's study of the Zeliangrongs shows how the incidents of violence eventually contribute to certain hardening and polarization of communities.

Displacement induced by ethnic conflicts brings in its wake newer and hitherto unknown forms of conflict. These conflicts obviously should not be seen as a continuation of older forms that are held as responsible for displacement. The micro-study of Sahu & Kundu gives us an idea of marginalization measured in terms of a change in landownership and occupational pattern in Tripura that displacement has brought in the lives of its victims. Many farmers, as some of our case studies point out, have overnight turned into rickshaw pullers

and landless labourers. Besides, the study made of the victims of riverbank erosion in Assam by Goswami and Das brings home how they have been prevented from settling in *char* areas largely inhabited by the *na-Asomiya*s. It is to be noted that the conflict mentioned in this case is internal to the members of apparently the same religious community, for both parties involved in it happen to be Muslims. The displaced persons are nonetheless unwelcome to their religious cousins. It aptly shows how even a religious tie does not prove strong enough to survive the experience of displacement. If religion cannot tie them together, neither can class. Goswami's ethnographic work in western Assam for example brings into focus the conflict between *poor* immigrants and *poor* indigenes. Ethnic and religious ties crumble in the first instance; they prevail over class ties in the second. This only takes us to the conclusion that displacement has a dynamic of its own and it will be wrong to reduce it to either ethnicity or class. Displacement redefines our ethnic and class relations in a variety of unanticipated ways. Indeed, we have reasons to suggest that ethnicities and classes are formed and transformed in tune with the experiences of displacement. The impact of displacement on ethnic and class formations needs to be more adequately researched.

Our case studies also indicate the reverse of the commonly held belief that displacement enhances vulnerability. While it is a truism that displacement makes the victims vulnerable to many other forms of denial and disablement, we suggest that it is the sufferance of many other forms of vulnerabilities that makes one prone to displacement. Debbarma finds a strong correlation between IPs (indigenous people) and the IDPs in Tripura. Riba's study on Arunachal Pradesh reinforces the correlation. The vulnerabilities that pre-exist the experience of displacement (poverty, tribal and indigenous social backgrounds) precisely make them vulnerable to displacement. While only 12 per cent of Assam's population is tribal, most of the development projects are sited in tribal areas. Ninety per cent of those who are going to be displaced if Pagladia Dam in Assam is ever commissioned happen to be tribals (Chowdhury 2006). In an ironic twist to the hypothesized correlation mentioned above, Chakrabarty suggests that there are grades of vulnerability and softness that suggest why Santhals and the immigrant Muslims have

to bear the brunt of Bodo militant attacks and not the Assamese, while all of them have been held as 'encroachers' on the proposed Bodoland.

Displacement, as Jana's study on the victims of riverbank erosion in Assam points out, leads to breakdown of family and the women who—while searching for their livelihood—have often to 'consent' to be trafficked, find themselves unacceptable to their husbands and families. They do not stop there losing out in life; they find ways of coping with life and prevailing over it. Migration, in Samaddar's famous phrase, is a form of 'self-empowerment' for many women (Samaddar 1997: 197). Contrary to the commonplace belief, women amongst the displaced are not to be seen as hapless victims. They are the ones who take the initiative of rebuilding lives in new and challenging situations. In a highly gendered labour market, they unlike their male counterparts enjoy greater access to such highly informal sector occupations as domestic help, sex trade, sewing and stitching, and so on. None of the studies included in this volume goes deep into the gender issue.

THE FICTIVE WORLD OF LAW

Article 14 of the Constitution of India guarantees 'equality before law' and 'equality in the eyes of law' as two principles informing our fundamental right to equality. It does not remove social inequalities prevailing in the society; it only brackets them out. Thus a fiction of equality is created in society in which the law is supposed to treat all the citizens at par with each other—as equal legal and juridical citizens. While critiquing Hegel, Marx in one of his early writings, for example, observed:

> … in order to behave as an *actual citizen of the state*, and to attain political significance and effectiveness, he must step out of his civil reality, disregard it, and withdraw from this whole organization into his individuality; for the sole existence which he finds for his citizenship of the state is his sheer blank individuality, since the existence of the state as executive is complete without him, and his existence in civil society is complete without the state. He can be a *citizen of the*

> *state* only in contradiction to these sole available communities, only as an *individual*. His existence as a citizen of the state is an existence outside his *communal* existences and is therefore *purely* individual (Marx 1975: 77).

Social or 'civil' inequalities as Marx calls them, according to the Constitution and the law of the land, will not be a hindrance to the enjoyment of our rights as equal legal personalities, provided we qualify ourselves for *what it takes to become equal legal personalities*. The world that creates the legal fiction of equality may be fictive but it sets for us certain actual qualifications we have to meet if we were to enter it. Our legal entitlements are directly related to our ability to meet these legal qualifications. Marx's dichotomy between the 'civil' and the 'legal' makes the latter a world by itself. Law creates a fictive world of equals but a world that the modern capitalist state seeks to actualize through all its everyday actions and protocols. Thus, it is by no means an ordinary fiction. However, since we are differentially endowed with our abilities, our entry into the fictive world of law can hardly be considered as equal. We are equal only insofar as we get into it. Displaced persons, as our case studies suggest, are displaced not simply from their homes or places of habitual residence but from the world of law that establishes the principle of equality for the citizens and treats them at par with each other.

We have already pointed out that neither the Constitution nor any law of the land views right to home or for that matter right against displacement as a non-derogable and fundamental right. We have policies that look upon relief and rehabilitation (like, Government of India's Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy of 2005) more as compensation for loss inflicted by displacement than as right to be claimed by the victims. It depends on the charity to be doled out by the government.

In political theory, we make a distinction between rights and justice. Rights relate to claims; justice to fairness. Not all claims are considered as rights. Our claims turn into rights when they suit the contemporary notions of justice—that is to say, what should be given to whom and by what means. For example, part of the reason why we thought we had a right to be independent is that the British rule was

perceived by us as unjust. While justice is the fountainhead of our claims to rights, claims turn into rights only when these are voiced in the language of law. The claimants have to establish themselves first of all as legal and juridical personalities in order to make their claims. The governmental mode of justice is premised on the universal bourgeois politics of rule of law, for it has to be administered and delivered through law. Observance of law is the first ground rule of administration of justice and sums up the essence of modern positive theory of law. Once law has been promulgated, we have to subject ourselves to it and this produces the doctrine of equality before law. The importance of justice-seeking legal subject in voicing claims and obtaining rights is being recognized in contemporary positive theory of law. One is entitled to justice only by becoming a justice-seeking legal subject. This implies a transformation of the political subject into a legal subject. The claim for compensation in other words can be voiced by the victims only after establishing them as legal personalities. That justice is denied to the victims per se is not important. Their access to justice is to be ensured by taking the route of law. This shows how justice is governmentalized and is subjected to its paraphernalia and complex modalities. In the absence of any legal recognition of their claims, the ad hocism that marks policies towards them is, as Goswami points out, in fact a means of governing them.

Displaced persons suffer from the double jeopardy of displacement and their acquired inability to articulate claims in the language of law. Even return to homes with the subsidence of conflicts becomes difficult when their villages are declared as 'forest reserves' by the Apex Court. As a result, an estimated 37,677 families (comprising 237,768 people)—according to the last count in August 2004—are unable to return to their homes and are staying in makeshift camps in three districts of western Assam: Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Dhubri. They receive rice for 10 days a month and that too after two to three months. Goswami's study shows that the affected Muslims cannot go back as they were settlers of the 1960s when the Government of Assam denotified these areas as forest reserves without giving them land *patta*s (titles). They cannot claim their ancestral home because they do not possess its title.

All the case studies contained in this volume point to the inability of the displaced persons to prove themselves as legal personalities eligible for protection under the law and with rights that the Constitution and the laws of the land guarantees to the people of this country. On being asked to prove their ownership over the land they have been living on—as per the provisions of law—a chief of a tribal community in Arunachal Pradesh expressed his surprise and quipped: 'The law came first or our ancestors?' (quoted in Kamcham 2006 mimeo). This attests to the death of the legal person. It is through millions of such deaths that the law establishes its hegemony over the society. The only identity recognized is the legal one. Identity as the social site of mutual recognition loses its importance. The declaration of Jampui Hills in Tripura as a forest reserve has created similar problems for the indigenous people. Debbarma in his study points out that most of the Dumbur Lake oustees could not produce documents in support of their claim to the ancestral land and hence, were deprived of the compensation—otherwise ruefully inadequate—for the loss that was inflicted on them and their communities by the commissioning of the hydroelectric project.

The flash floods of Balbala in Goalpara, lower Assam, on 7–9 October 2004, not only washed away the papers and documents that can prove their identity and but also the bodies. Most of the dead bodies could not be found as the flash flood reportedly moved at over 100 km/hr speed. The government's policy of compensating the victims only against the dead bodies denied compensation to many of the victims whose bodies could not be recovered or were too decomposed to be identified (Ahmed 2006 mimeo). According to government estimate, only 218 persons lost their lives while unofficial estimates keep the figure well above 1,000. People who lose their lands—whether on the ground of having stayed in forest reserves or on the ground of having no duly conveyed title of landownership—find it difficult to establish their right to land or home in the first place. Since most of the victims were new settlers who came to Balbala only recently as their earlier homes were 'completely eroded' by the Brahmaputra, they were—as a survey conducted by the Dolphin Trust argues—'illegal occupants' although all their names were recorded in the places of their previous residence.

Their names are not recorded with the administration of their newly settled district.

Everywhere IDPs find it impossible to establish themselves as equal legal personalities and remain outside the fictive world of law that continuously strengthens and reinforces itself through a set of commonly noticed modalities. In Tamil Nadu, the problem was all the more appalling after the Tsunami (December 2004). Although a trans-national disaster and therefore under massive media glare, the fishermen of Tamil Nadu lost their land and livelihood rights precisely as a result of the disaster. While freshly announcing the plan for resettlement, the GO 172 of the Government of Tamil Nadu, for example, pointed out that communities living within 200 m of the coastline would not be eligible for any relief and assistance at all, for, their very settlement was illegal. Those living between 200 and 500 m would be eligible for only 50 per cent of the relief and assistance announced for the victims, while those living beyond 1,000 m would be eligible for full 100 per cent relief and assistance. This once again heavily discriminates against the particularly poorer communities that usually live closest to the coastline, and deprives them of the right to residence and settlement that they have been habitually exercising for generations. These people once again have become unable to enjoy their traditional rights as a result of this natural disaster. The government has decided not to interfere with the hotels and private resorts that have come up within 100 m of the coastline. Similarly in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands which was hit by the same Tsunami, it was found that the judges' quarters and even the air force residential quarters were actually constructed in 'no-build zones'. In simple terms, this shows how natural disasters deprive the vulnerable sections of their traditional rights to residence and livelihood.

The IDPs find it difficult to settle themselves in alien places. No place is safe enough for their resettlement. Although the Constitution of India guarantees right to move about and settle in any part of India as a fundamental right (Article 19) albeit with some exceptions—particularly relating to emergency and inner line provisions—IDPs find it difficult to settle and relocate themselves in areas which they think are safe and where they think they have greater chances

of livelihood. We have examples of informal regimes and practices being developed in the North East. Anyone migrating to Meghalaya today through Byrnihat check point is required to show one's documents establishing landownership with the effect that any landless person cannot migrate to and serve as a migrant labour in Meghalaya. At one level, this practice implies violation of one's fundamental right. But unless such violations are brought to the notice of the court, there is hardly any prospect of legal and constitutional remedy. Besides, persons displaced as a result of riverbank erosion and floods in Assam and migrating to Nagaland, as our studies point out, are often branded as 'Bangladeshis'.

The present era of globalization has brought a new category of 'marginals' into existence. The marginals are not to be conflated with the poor—a more conventional category—whose lack of purchasing power threatens, almost in equal proportion, their right to survive. The marginals are poor in the sense of lacking the purchasing power but are not starved and do not die of starvation. They manage to survive by collecting their needs from forests, using common property resources and depending on public facilities. But with growing privatization of these resources and facilities, they find it difficult, if not impossible, to eke out a living of their own. Public lands do not necessarily go to private owners. Today the government usurps the land that is not privately owned and uses it in its own interest. This hastens what Fernandes and Barbora call, 'deterioration of conditions of life' and they attribute a good deal of displacement to it. While people traditionally settled in so-called 'public land' or depending on 'common property resources'(CPRs) are being deprived of their right to residence, collection from and cultivation in them, these lands are slowly and surreptitiously changing hands and are going to the government. This is how Walter Fernandes in a paper describes the process in an anecdotal style:

> We consider information on the CPRs important because we know that most of the land acquired for development projects belongs to this category. There are indications from limited data we got that in the North East CPRs are two-thirds of the land used for projects. For example, most land used for refugee rehabilitation was CPRs but hardly any record exists of it. We were given oral information that

> much of Paltan Bazaar and Fancy Bazaar in Guwahati was common land in 1947 and was given for refugee rehabilitation but no records have been kept. Ten thousand East Pakistan Garo refugees were resettled in forest land in Nagaon and were later shifted to Karbi Anglong but no records of this allotment are available. Much of what was acquired for the Dispur capital area was tribal CPRs. We were told off record that it was an interdepartmental transfer and no records were kept. Off record we were told that at some stage 80 acres were handed over illegally to an individual. When there was a possibility of it becoming a scandal. Someone destroyed all the files (Fernandes 2005, mimeo).

The death of a legal person implies not only loss of home with many of its unquantifiable ramifications underlined above but also infringement of many other rights that follow upon one's identity as a legal person. It, as R. K. Ranjan Singh argues, implies violation of the right to environment. It deprives, according to Fernandes and Barbora, one's right to livelihood and therefore life. Riverbank erosion perhaps provides an extreme case of such infringement. Jana's study shows how displacement due to erosion means submergence of numerous villages and administrative units where the names of affected persons were enlisted as voters. Now with submergence, they get disenfranchised. It has to be noted that our legal and juridical personalities in the age of nation-states are mostly territorially anchored. We live in a mohalla, a revenue village, come under a Panchayat Samiti and live under the jurisdiction of a district, a state and region. All this is a sequel to our identity as a member of a nation-state. Fresh inclusion of their names in electoral rolls takes time, requires renewed administrative endeavours, and therefore involves money and corruption in a country like India. Since their names do not figure in electoral rolls, they do not become a subject of political campaigns and electioneering. The death of a legal person explains why they remain invisible even during elections. It is the imperative of visibility, as Hussain argues, that ironically drives the government to rehabilitate the ex-insurgents and not the victims displaced by them. The world of law in short defines the rules of visibility and screens the victims from public and media glare.

By contrast, Poddar's study points out how displacement in Champaknagar, Tripura, being located strategically as the gateway

to the vast tribal-inhabited region, has made it the cynosure of attention of the ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura that has of late been cutting into the popularity of the former in these areas. Champaknagar is now developing not because of any concern for the displaced persons per se but because it has the potential of being showcased while campaigning for the tribal votes in the immediate hinterland. The ground rules of visibility are never clearly laid down and seem to be defined by electoral prospects.

Victims of riverbank erosion, as Nazmin Banu Islam shows, are scattered everywhere and lack organizational strength to mobilize and re-enfranchise themselves. Our studies in riverbank erosion show the emergence of many *char*s and riverine islands which are yet to be officially and legally charted out. These are areas which do not fall under any police station, where there is no legal landownership except possession and occupation of land, with, as Jana argues, power of 'man, money and muscle'. The occupants of the areas levy 'taxes' and impose 'rents' on people who do not have any option but to settle in these areas. During my own fieldwork in the district of Murshidabad (West Bengal) in March 2006, I remember one of my interlocutors—himself a settler in a 'God-forsaken' *char* on the river Padma—tellingly describing themselves as 'husks of the paddy'. The husks have nowhere to be dumped, while the grains (affected people with reasonable means) have left the husks long back and relocated themselves in nearby towns. The people's wish to settle themselves in these areas exactly in accordance with the way they were settled earlier is always interrupted by the operation of these powers. By not extending legality to people's wishes, the state commits omissions evidently at the behest of these powers. These areas are virtual no-man's land where laws of the state do not apply. In the absence of any organized banking operations, poor people fall prey to the clutches of private moneylenders (*mahajan*s). This only adds to their misery and marginalization. Jana's study draws our attention to many an inter-district rivalry over these newly emerged *char*s. These tracts of land remaining outside the rule of law consist of those who lack legal and juridical personalities. There is a growing trend towards their ghettoization and separation from the fictive world of

law. As we have many of such uncharted neighbourhoods growing up in recent years, so we have revenue villages long submerged but existing only in government records.

We have to recognize that justice is what rights are, framed in the language of law, and cannot probably exhaust. It is the indissoluble remainder that perpetually pushes rights claims beyond the given threshold of law. It is the process whereby the justice-seeking political subject wants to be recognized as a justice-seeking legal subject. The case studies included in this volume singularly call for widening the sphere of rights and implicitly make a case for appropriate legal reforms. Laws are meant for the people and not people for the laws.

POLITICS OF RELIEF AND REHABILITATION

As we have already argued, the question of relief and rehabilitation in the North East has so far been treated more as charity than as right.[5] The death of victims' legal personalities has only worsened their condition. While they have to depend on government's charity to be showered on them, the death of their legal personalities has displaced them from even claiming the benefits of government policies.

Our case studies more or less give credence to the same hypothesis of ethnic preponderance, outlined above, in matters of relief and rehabilitation. Displacement is not the climactic point of ethnic conflicts; it should rather be regarded as a moment in the continuation of ethnic and community conflicts in the region. Relief and rehabilitation too, including the ones doled out by the government, are driven by ethnic considerations. Indeed we have evidences suggesting that in the case of conflict-induced displacement, the government on many occasions leave the victims to fend for themselves. It is only when the dominant communities of the state are affected that the government tends to rise to the occasion and relief camps are put in place. Even if relief camps are set up, the victims simply refuse to take shelter in them on the ground that these are run by a government that is perceived to have acted in collusion with their other. Radhika Ramasheshan's account of the Bodo victims of

Gohpur in 1989 (Ramaseshan 1989: 101) is a testimony to this. The Bodo victims refused to take shelter in the relief camps on the ground that these were believed to have been run by a government that was dominated by the Assamese. Many of them preferred to live in pitiable conditions outside the camps and some even fled away to neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh.

On the other hand, respective communities of the affected persons take displacement as an affront to their community and are seen to promptly swing into action and play a role in sheltering the victims of displacement. In situations where government relief is both tardy and meagre, communities fill in the void and the affected people too feel assured by the help and succour extended to them by their communities. In the words of the NPMHR report: 'So far the contribution has been internally generated from the Naga communities in and around the affected areas'. The NPMHR document also urges all to extend all kinds of help to the Nagas migrating from the Imphal valley in the wake of anti-ceasefire extension agitation. Insofar as conflicts seem to erode the last trace of trust that exists till the rivalry brews or comes to a head, it becomes extremely difficult to expect some such help to come from the rival community even as a symbolic gesture and for trust to be instantly rebuilt to overcome the conflict. While Pong Deila informs us that help rendered by the community has been both 'effective' and 'powerful', one should not lose sight of the fact that it also rivets the bonds of unity within the community and helps in further sharpening the divide that separates two conflicting communities. Although the geographical size of the district of Karbi Anglong is otherwise very vast, people, as Uttam Bathari tells us, 'almost know each other while they do not see eye to eye now'.[6]

However, we have also spectacular examples of trust being rebuilt by the conflicting communities sometimes without the mediation of the state. As late as 2005, for example, an accord was signed between warring Mizo Zirlai Pawl and Bru National Liberation Front. But all this has proven to be difficult in a situation where the communities have been involved in open and direct hostilities. The role of such community organizations in extending relief and rehabilitation to the affected people without the government assistance has

been effective in other cases also. The Car Nicobarese of the Nicobar group of islands, otherwise devastated by the Tsunami mentioned earlier, reconstructed their lives without falling back on the state. Indeed, the tribals lack any notion of 'orphan' and looking after those who lost their parents due to Tsunami is considered by them as the entire community's obligation. The Government of India continued to try in vain to reclaim the 'orphans' and rehabilitate them. While this can hardly be considered as a conflict situation, it is found to be generally true that when trust between two or more communities is breached irreparably, it is not easy to rebuild the same. Evidences from the Gujarat carnage (2002) also point to the same conclusion. Menon tells us poignantly how few Hindus who were obsessed with a sense of responsibility of doing something as atonement to the Muslims being grossly wronged and displaced by the carnage found it difficult to be accepted by them:

> 'Hindu' was a word they associated with terror, with fire, with frightening shouts of the right-wing chant 'Jai Shri Ram', with fleeing in the night. These children were playing games of *Hindu Toli* (meaning 'gang' or 'group') versus *Muslim Toli* in the camp—so of course it was inconceivable to them any Hindu would have spent this time playing with them and making them laugh (Menon 2003: 75).

It is only in conflicts induced by ethnic conflicts that the mediation of the state that is seen as 'neutral' becomes necessary. The essays contained in this volume however point to the paucity and meagreness of the government help and relief. Barman for example describes the government-run relief camps in the Kokrajhar and other Bodo-inhabited areas as 'virtual concentration camps'. Many of these camps housing the Santhals and the Muslims have been routinely attacked by the Bodo militants. It is the inability of the government to protect the victims that has led, according to Bhaumik, the Santhals to launch their own militant outfits like the Birsa Commando Force and Adivasi Cobra Force. While researches on development-induced displacement draw our attention to the inherent tendency of disorganizing and disarticulating the communities affected by it (Dasgupta 2004), relief and rehabilitation extended by the communities in situations of conflict-induced

displacement contribute to certain reinforcement of the community bonds and hardening of the boundaries that separate them. The post-conflict care and rehabilitation centres run by the communities, for example, easily turn into nurseries of future enmity and strife. Goswami's study on western Assam brings home the intricacies of how such lines are drawn: While Lutheran World Service-I has been working with the Christian Bodos, Jamiat Ulema-ul-Hind is seen to be working for the Muslims and runs a madrasah in the area. When ethnicity is preponderant, relief camp only provides one more site for the ongoing interethnic conflicts and community violence.

THE DEVELOPMENT DEBATE

We know that two of the major sources of displacement in the region happen to be conflict and development. The ethnic preponderance hypothesis interestingly works out well in the context of the region's development. Resistance to development and development-induced displacement emanates not so much from a critique of the development model per se hitherto followed in the region (or for that matter in the country as a whole) but from the uneven impact that it has as one of its *intended consequence*s on diverse ethnic communities living in the region. While the people of the region have to bear the cost of development by way of getting displaced, others in the country are to reap its benefits. The question of displacement is integrally connected with the larger issue of inter-regional balance and justice. The industrialization that has taken place and has been taking place is of an extractive and 'colonial' nature—mainly in the nature of siphoning the region's natural resources to the so-called mainland, processing them and then selling them back to the people (Misra 1980, Sharma 1991). The much-touted Arakan gas pipeline that is supposed to pass through the region is feared to displace thousands of people in Tripura and Mizoram and fill the cylinders and coffers of the people in the mainland. Obviously this model of development is ethnically skewed and has an ethically uneven impact.

What earlier used to be the 'North East' and regarded as an almost indivisible category has of late been disegregated into a conglomerate

of imaginary ethnic homelands and resentments against development projects sparking off displacement take on an essentially ethnic character. There seems to have emerged hardly any solidarity of displaced victims of development cutting across the ethnic and community ties that ordinarily separate them. Indeed, a *people* comes into being when victims of diverse ethnic communities come together and evolve joint strategies of resistance to whatever has been held as responsible for their displacement. Displacement alone should serve as a common thread binding diverse sections of people together. It is only with this common struggle that a new form of social power emerges.

The North East is likely to be damned by dams now under way sooner rather than later. But, few recognize that construction of dams has become a new source of ethnic conflict in the region. Of late there has been significant resistance to the proposed construction of dams in the region. The Pagladia Dam project was cleared in 2000. It is true that there are some sections of people who want the dam to be constructed. It was estimated in 1968 that about 18,000 persons were going to be affected by the construction. The number has now shot up to 125,000 persons, predominantly belonging to the Bodos, spread over as many as 38 villages. One of the reasons why such gross discrepancies arise between the official and unofficial estimates is that the former only include individual landowners, while most of the tribal IDPs are not landowners and depend on common property resources for their wherewithal. The 'Bodos' refuse to bear the brunt of 'Assam's development'. Many of the respondents interviewed by the authors of this volume oppose the construction not because it is based on a flawed paradigm of development that is disastrous and ecocidal by nature but because it makes the Bodos or for that matter, the indigenous people pay the price of development for the Assamese or others: 'Why should the Bodos alone be made to pay the price of their development?'—retorted one of them going to be affected by the construction. The impact of the dams has always been ethnically uneven. Some communities are required to pay the price of development for others. According to Tarik Kamcham of Tribal Survival, a voluntary initiative, the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Power Project is going

to adversely affect about 100,000 people and physically displace about 5,000 persons. All these are counted interestingly by him as, 'Arunachal Pradesh's losses' (Kamcham 2006). Ethnic preponderance leads to an ethnicization of our concerns and anxieties.

The Bodos by all accounts are also taking along the Muslims in their struggle. This is significant in view of the fact the Bodo movement, as we have seen, at one time was targeted against the immigrant Muslims settled in proposed Bodoland areas. This has actually brought the people belonging to diverse communities once hostile to each other together and this seems to be a very significant development in the North East. In Tipaimukh, the Zeliangrong Nagas have joined hands with the Assamese of the upper Assam districts of Dhemaji and Lakhimpur in their resistance to the construction. The emergence of people as multiethnic coalition is a new development in the region. This, as I argue, implies the rise of a new republican form of social power that transcends the ethnic boundaries and differences. Republicanism is what brings people of diverse communities together and fires them with a concern for what is called, 'common good'. If our case studies do not openly stretch out to explicitly embrace what we in political theory call, the republican spirit, they definitely go a long way in warning us against taking an overtly ethnic, chauvinistic or narrowly communal view of displacement.[7] The purpose in this book has been to launch displacement as an autonomous agenda in the public discourse and to lend to it the visibility that it justly deserves. It is important to see how such a republican spirit can be inculcated. L. Leiren Singh pleads for educational reforms for bringing peace into the centre stage of public agenda.

Some years back in a paper written on displacement in North East India, I tried to argue that displacement is not the result of any policy void. It is not that dearth of policies is responsible for triggering off displacement in the region. Quite the contrary, my point was that displacement is the logical culmination of a package of policies that our relevant governments have followed from time to time including policies of interethnic management, management of interstate and international borders, environment and the region's rich flora and fauna, development policies, and so on and so forth (Das 2000a: 88–105). This book however offers contrasting

perspectives on what I considered at that time as a simple answer. While separate studies by Misra and Hussain find displacement as a corollary to the development model hitherto pursued in the region, those of Mandal and Behera on one hand and Fernandes and Barbora on the other do not oppose development per se. We know that the Michael Cernea model that inspires much of World Bank's development funding in recent years seeks to resolve the development-displacement paradox by popularizing the principle that 'the lifestyle of the affected persons should be better after the project than before it because they are called upon to pay its price'. Fernandes and Barbora therefore call for recognizing—not right against displacement—but right to rehabilitation as a fundamental right. Displacement induced by development is permitted as long as rehabilitation is provided. On the other hand, as Misra argues, Cernea's is a rehabilitation model and not a rights-based model. It does not treat protest against development inducing displacement as a fundamental right—whether rehabilitation is provided or not.

The book makes only a primary attempt at placing internal displacement as part of the public agenda. This requires to be complemented by more research on areas, some of which have been identified by us. We will feel rewarded if we succeed in achieving these goals.

NOTES

1. There is a problem involved here. Sometimes, the studies do not agree on such basic things as the number of the displaced persons involved in a particular case. The state will always find it cumbersome to acknowledge the enormity of the problem and downplay the number. Even the contributors are not in accord. They have all employed different methodologies to arrive at their respective figures. I have not tried to correct them and make them uniform. For, I do not have any agreed-upon way to cross-check and verify them. The idea is not so much to load us with figures and estimates and delve into the hairsplitting details but to appreciate the existence of a problem. Moreover, any census on displaced persons unnecessarily and prematurely drags us into some definitional and methodological controversies and thereby detains us before we set out to conduct our researches. Any such data are also liable to be misused.

2. For a review of these rights, see, Kalin (2000).
3. His presentation to the Orientation Workshop on 'Rethinking Rights, Justice and Development in India' organized by Calcutta Research group and Panos South Asia in Guwahati on April 21, 2006.
4. For a discussion of the hierarchizing of macro-security over the micro ones, see, Samaddar (2006).
5. For a discussion of this, see, Chatterji.
6. Uttam Bathari, presentation to the Orientation Workshop on 'Rethinking Rights, Justice and Development in India'.
7. For a discussion of the republican spirit, see, Pettit (1997).

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Section I
Arunachal Pradesh

1

Socio-economic Portents of Displacement of Indigenous Peoples

P. K. Mandal and M. C. Behera

Amidst the initial euphoria of launching the modern development process in Arunachal Pradesh, not enough thought was in all probability spared for satisfactorily tackling its fall-outs. Presently after five decades of setting the development process in motion some of its undesirable portents are coming into sight. Such preliminary hints indicative of substantive dislocation of population can be traced virtually in almost all major sectors of the state's social and economic life. While there are obvious constraints in calling the sectoral dislocations of indigenous population as 'displacement', it would be clearly difficult to deny it is happening. The difference in perception with regard to 'dislocation' as 'displacement' is more of an emphasis in their nuance and not of substance. The constraint of grasping 'displacement' begins right there.

DEVELOPMENT AND DISPLACEMENT

Perceiving 'displacement' is not as difficult as defining it. Attempts are being made of late, to define displacement in clear and precise terms. However, these have yet to find an inscrutable space within the body of social science. But the lack of any categorical statement

of the sensitive phenomenon is, in many ways, a consequence of the non-application of mind by the state to the effect of its myriad policies on society.

For all practical purposes, in the period after the conclusion of the Second World War, the state came to occupy a pivotal position in almost all the affairs of societies. 'Development' was thus pushed as the most desirable goal following a model that had become overtly 'dominant' in the psyche of national leaders. Ignoring the differing nuances of developmental perspectives which had been guiding the communities to achieve for themselves progressive adjustment in accordance with their own needs and in their own way, within their specific geo-cultural environment, this rush for a unifying development created a logical mismatch between what was desirable and what actually ensued. Undoubtedly, therefore, a researcher of whatever hue, encountered the conceptual dilemma of reconciling the figures of so-called developmental achievements on the one hand and the facts of societal experience of dislocation and displacement on the other. From an empirical perspective, of course, such a problem would not cause much inconvenience. Clearly, it would be an abiding duty on the part of the researcher/s to highlight the reality on the ground unconcerned with the paranoia of theory, which so often seemed inevitable. The present paper is an attempt to do precisely this, that is, take stock of the process of development in the predominantly tribal state of Arunachal Pradesh and look at the socio-economic portents of actual or possible displacements of indigenous peoples in the state.

LOCUS AND PORTENTS OF 'DISPLACEMENT' IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

The Fall-outs of Tea Plantations in Lohit and Tirap

Some vested interests misinterpret traditional law in their own favour. In the absence of cadastral survey and assigning land rights to the individuals, the village community is being deprived of the use of common property resources. Mass acquisition of land by planters in Lohit, Changlang and Tirap districts have denied 'others' in the village community access to the further expansion of agricultural

land consequent upon the growth of population. Particularly, in case of Lathao, where the chief's family has occupied almost all the village land for tea plantation, the action has deprived common villagers from access to agricultural land, thereby leading to their migrating out of the village to further remote areas and to the nearby Namsai urban centres. In many such cases, as it has happened in the above mentioned Lathao case, these migrants already accustomed to a particular geo-cultural lifestyle find themselves ill-suited for the requirements of either an urban setting or the demands of a hard life in the new places.

In Hauliang sub-division, especially in the Changlang circle, Below Poverty Line (BPL) rice through the public distribution system and temporary money-gifts by the politicians of the area have weaned villagers away from the traditional food crop cultivation in favour of the more lucrative business of rice-beer and illegal poppy-culture. As of now, the impact of such vocations have not fully dawned on the minds of the villagers. In similar situations elsewhere, as in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and the tribal belts of Madhya Pradesh poppy cultivation has brought in vested interests and Mafiosi to dominate the business with a criminal nexus ultimately exposing the cultivators to the dangers of displacement. Being harassed by both the security agencies, the State Excise Departments and the criminal groups in these areas, the people have found life unbearable and hence have been forced to ultimately move out, leaving their homes and hearths behind. In case of the Lohit district a similar possibility cannot ultimately be ruled out. The place comes within the greater ambit of insurgencies, otherwise a characteristic of North Eastern India. Unfortunately, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh has not chalked out any strategy to address these issues.

Consequences of the National Demand of Timbers

In Namsai sub-division, about 20 saw and veneer-mills were operating before the Supreme Court's ban was imposed on timber harvests in December 1996. These saw-mills largely met the requirements of the national metropolitan and commercial demands putting an enormous strain on the natural eco-system of the state. The capitalist moneybags—local links only holding the licenses issued by the state

government—invested the capital. Due to the high profit margin in the form of easy money that lined the pockets of the local contractors, indiscriminate exploitation of forest resources of the area received a boost both legally and illegally.

In Pasighat area too, the institution of *Marang* initially came under severe stress out of such aggressive commercialization of *Marang* resources by the self-claimed individual proprietors whose ancestors had the openness to allow the common villagers to have access to the *Marang* resources for livelihood. But as the timber business became more lucrative, the individual/family proprietors, asserting their claims with reference to the customary norms, deprived the villagers from using the *Marang* resources and used the same only for private gain. This raised questions of continuing sustenance for the deprived villagers, who in one way or the other are experiencing a deprivation-induced social and economic dislocation.

On the face of it, these examples may only hint at the economic consequences of timber harvesting in the state but they have other subtle portents as well, which have been experienced in other densely populated areas having a similar environment. It has a telling effect on such life-supporting resources as the availability of water from the natural hill-streams. With the denudation of forest cover, these streams become the first environmental victims and people depending on them naturally suffer as a result. The tribal way of life, particularly in Arunachal Pradesh, where the density of population was traditionally very sparse and which allowed people to collect their essential requirements from the nearby and surrounding forests, will come under severe strain forcing long-scale displacement of people from their natural areas of habitation. It was only after such an experience when the people of the Uttar Pradesh hills started migrating to the plains for lack of sustainability in their homeland, that Sunderlal Bahuguna began his famous Chipko Movement. Arunachal Pradesh certainly has to learn a lesson from Bahuguna's movement considering the present trend of urbanization with the rapidly increasing rural-urban migration in the state being observed from 1981 to 1991.

As for the upward trend in the incidence of rural migration, the push factor can be located in the shrinkage of the rural resource-base

mostly in the form of cultivable lands and absence of alternative life-chances in these areas. In Kheron, the Farmer's Training Centre (FTC) in the late 1970s occupied 400 hectares of cultivable village lands thereby depriving the village population's access to necessary cultivable land for livelihood. Consequently many families have migrated to Namsai and Chaukham administrative headquarters in search of alternative avenues. In Miao sub-division after the fallow lands were converted to tea estates, the people experienced reduced *jhum* cycles and low agricultural productivity. The tea estates are set up in the first place by obtaining Land Occupation Certificates (LOC) from the district administration, though the land in principle belongs to the village community as a whole. The unsuspecting villagers enter into such negotiations with the estate owners, which ultimately create an environment for their gradual displacement, as the planters bring skilled workers from other places crowding the place and putting additional pressure on the village resources.

CONCLUSION

These are some findings based on a preliminary inquiry made by the authors. It is not the contention of the paper to say that the process of development be stopped in the state. But the serious fall-outs of the development process, which have so far been lost in the generalist socio-economic researches, need to be seen from the point of view of displacement. The new paradigm in fact offers, in a very subtle manner, an opportunity to allow the people so displaced to have their independent voice. The non-governmental as well as the governmental agencies including of course academics must articulate this voice of the people to help the state devise the necessary mechanisms and strategies to allow a legitimate space for the marginalized sections of the indigenous rural population within the developmental framework. As of now this phenomenon of displacement looks minuscule enough to be ignored. But considering the level of development of the state and its population density, the problem is significant—if not alarming. The state must look into the problem at its incipient stage before it becomes too late.

2

Proposed Subansiri Hydel Project: A Case Study of Potential Displacement

TIMO RIBA

This paper is based on the field study carried out by the Department of Geography, Arunachal Pradesh, with the author as its field co-coordinator. The Department of Geography was assigned the task of 'Social and Population Survey', both the household and village schedule of the areas that would be affected due to the construction of three dams over the river Subansiri.

Initially the proposal was for construction of a single dam at Gerukhamukh, where the river Subansiri joins the plains of Assam. Accordingly, the Brahmaputra Board of Flood Control started construction work for providing the logistic support by building offices, residential buildings, schools, stores and also purchased vehicles, machineries, and so on. They constructed roads and bridges to reach the dam site. As the dam height was expected to be very high and a vast area would come under its submergence (even Dumborijo and Daporijo came under submergence), the proposal was cancelled due to which construction was abandoned midway.

In the 1990s another proposal was mooted for construction of a three dam axis at the following points:

1. Gerukhamukh, between West Siang and Lower Subansiri.
2. Tamen, over the river Kamala, in between Raga and Boasimla.
3. Menga, 15 km upstream of Daporijo.

Gerukhamukh: Gerukhamukh is located about 10 km away from Gagamukh, Assam, where the river Subansiri joins the plains of Assam. Here the river Subansiri divides the West Siang and Lower Subansiri on the right and left respectively. Galos of West Siang call Subansiri as Sinyik. The bed level of the dam axis is 120 m above mean sea level (amsl), Full Reserve Level (FRL) is 205 m. Its height is 185 m and the reservoir area would be 371 sq km.

The physical survey of the area along the river course revealed that the tail of the stored water would reach up to Nuk. But due to a steep wall on both the banks there is no chance of the water in the reservoir spreading to both banks. The nearest villages are Sibrite and Gengi of Gensi circle of West Siang district and Panimori and Nuk of Dumporijo of Upper Subansiri. In case of Sibrite and Gengi, the settlements are at 350 m and 145 m above FRL respectively. But few pockets of terraced rice fields and *jhum* (swidden or slash-and burn cultivation) land situated close to the river Subansiri, Siji and Sigen would be submerged. Along with the submergence of the place, numbers of planted fruit trees like orange, banana and pineapple would also be destroyed. Few bamboo thickets, Takaupatta groves, permanent fishing points, and so on, would also come under the submergence. Though the settlements may not be affected, but due to submergence of terraced fields, some families would be affected and indirectly lead to displacement of the people. But in villages like Panimori and Nuk, the stored water would not affect the villages and any agricultural field because the height of the river there would be very low.

Tamen Dam of Kamala River: The dam axis is located 3 km up stream of Tamen and 1 km downstream of Kamporijo village. Very little work has been done near the dam axis. The height of the bed level of the river is 267 m above sea level, the FRL of the dam is 475 m and the dam height is 213 m.

The stored water would reach up to Tali. But here too, due to hard rocks, the river forms a U-shaped valley with a steep wall except near Kamporijo, Puku, Tebsi, Bam and Duggi, where it is a little wider. As already pointed out, due to its U-shape course, the number of villages very near the river is very less. The nearest villages are Puku, Kamporijo, Tebsi, Bam and Duggi. The whole village of Puku, Tebsi and Bam would be submerged. In case of Kamporijo, the area

under middle school and lower portion would be submerged; if the FRL is 475 m. Duggi would also be partially submerged.

Menga Dam: Originally the dam axis was proposed at 9 km up stream from Daporijo due to which 24 villages with 275 households would have been affected. Sippi has the highest number of households totaling 73 in number, which would also have came under submergence.

The dam axis has now been shifted a little up stream from Menga. Now the number of villages that would be affected has come down from 24 to 14 and the number of households from 275 to 109 only. Here too, due to steep banks, the number of settlements close to the river is very low. Those which are found near the river are also very few in number both in households and population. The total number of affected population estimated in 1998 was about 226.

It was found during the field survey that in all the three dam sites, the inhabitants were very aware of the proposal for construction of dams. They were also aware of the displacement that would occur due to the construction of these dams. The majority of the respondents, excepting a few at Litmori of Gensi circle, were found to be very cooperative. Almost all the respondents opted for land compensation and cash money for loss of other properties like fruit trees, Takaupatta, bamboo thickets, fishing points, and so on. A few opted for regular jobs or vocational training in order to earn their living.

Inhabitants of all the above villages are *jhumia*s (swidden or slash and burn cultivators). The people have merely a hand to mouth existence. In the months of May, June and July, a maximum number of villages suffer from shortage of food. Malnutrition is common. Interestingly, the economy of the people of all the three dam sites is the same.

These areas are deprived of many basic social amenities. Lack of proper roads is the biggest hurdle in these areas. To reach Gensi and to reach the villages located on the right bank of the Subansiri especially under Taliha circle, one has to either raft across the turbulent river by bamboo raft or take the dangerous ropeway. Due to these problems people die of even minor illnesses. The common diseases are malaria,

diarrhoea, dysentery, jaundice and skin diseases. There are schools but mostly without teachers or with insufficient teachers. In these areas development is lagging behind by about 50 years compared to what it is even in the urban centres of Arunachal Pradesh.

3

Displacement and Refugee Issue in Arunachal Pradesh

P. K. Panigrahi

The refugee population of the Chakmas and Hajongs settled in Arunachal Pradesh has raised many questions. The indigenous people living in the area where the refugees are settled have raised their voice against the Central Government's initiative of settling them there. Though apparently there is no physical displacement of the indigenous population due to the settlement of these refugees, the indigenous people seem to feel threatened by their presence. The opening sentence of the white paper brought out by the Government of Arunachal Pradesh is a pointer in this regard. It says: 'During the last over three decades, the Chakma & Hajong refugee issue has been the matter of simmering discontent among the indigenous tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh'.

The Chakmas and Hajongs were displaced from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Mymensingh district of present day Bangladesh due to religious persecution and installation of the Kaptai Dam in that area. The first batch of these refugees was settled in Arunachal Pradesh—then known as the Tirap Division of North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in 1964. The decision was unilateral by nature, and the indigenous people were neither taken into confidence nor consulted. The imposed nature of the decision for settlement is clear from the correspondence between the Governor of Assam (then NEFA under the direct administration of the Central Government,

administered through the Governor of Assam) and the then Chief Minister of Assam (D.O. Letter No. G.A-71/64 dated 10 April, 1964). The 'original group of refugees' who immigrated between 1964 and 1969 consisted of a total number of 2,748 families with about 15,000 persons who were settled in around 10,799 acres of land spread over the three districts of Lohit, Subansiri and Tirap. The special census which was carried out by the Government in 1979 gives a demographic pattern which hints at the phenomenal growth of the refugee population. The refugee population increased from about 15,000 to 21,500 by 1979 and further swelled to 30,064 (1991 census). It is estimated by the refugees themselves that the present population is around 65,000. Obviously the land allotted earlier is now insufficient. And they have spread out to apparently vacant land which the indigenous people now need due to population pressure. Further, keeping in view the essence of the Inner Line Permit, which restricts the entry of non-locals into the area, the settlement of the 'foreign' refugees in the state sounds ironical. In any case, the anxieties of the indigenous population have not been assuaged. The All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) launched a series of agitations and organized several rallies in 1995 (Dutta 1998).

Though the refugee settlement did not directly displace the indigenous population from their ancestral habitat and as they were settled in vacant land at that period of time, nevertheless, the indigenous population lost the community's right to land due to the settlement. Further, as the refugee population is increasing day by day, whether due to the increase of family size or due to the continuous inflow of new groups or both, it is bound to create problems as it did in Assam during 1979–85.

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4

A Case Study of the Sulungs (Puroiks)

Sristidhar Dutta and Tana Showren

Internal displacement is caused due to a variety of factors. One is displacement that is effected by governmental action or policy like that of grouping of Mizo villages in Mizoram during the insurgency period and the other surprisingly is liberation from the traditional slave system prevailing in a part of the erstwhile Kameng and Subansiri districts of present-day Arunachal Pradesh. The Sulungs of Arunachal Pradesh (now called Puroiks) are a case in point. Displacement has been caused by a well-intentioned, humanitarian and liberal policy of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh of liberating them from the age-old system of slavery practised in a part of the state.

WHO ARE THE SULUNGS?

As regards the origin of the Sulungs, the views of some important scholars deserve mention here. Verrier Elwin has written about them like this:

> Living among the Bangnis (Nyishi) and Nyishi (earlier called Daflas) are small groups of Sulungs who may be the aboriginal inhabitants of the Country. They are essentially hunters and food-gatherers, but they also work well in iron and brass, and in recent times have taken

> to a little cultivation. Many of them are little better than slaves to the Nyishi.[1]

A similar view has also been expressed by Furer-Haimendorf, who writes,

> Agriculture, livestock breeding, food-gathering and fishing allowed most Nyishis to maintain a high degree of self-sufficiency in so far as food is concerned, and small communities dwelling in woodland not exhausted by over cultivation could have survived for long periods even without contact with other population in the same way as the Sulungs of the Subansiri Region subsisted in almost complete isolation, on food-gathering, hunting and minimal slash-and-burn cultivation. (1982)

The approaches of these two pioneer researchers are, however, unable to throw light on the servile status of the Sulungs under their Nyishi masters. Even in an article published in 1977, R. K. Deori has echoed almost an identical view about the Sulungs. He writes,

> At present the Sulungs are by and large, living in a depressed way in the inaccessible and rugged hills of North Eastern Kameng, but some of them living in the North Western Hills of Subansiri district too ... The Sulungs are of Mongoloid Stock. ...They are physically strong but temperamentally very quiet, truthful and hospitable. The Sulungs are agriculturists on one hand and food-gatherers on the other, as their agricultural crops are quite insufficient for their subsistence. In fact the Sulung is the most backward and economically poor community of Kameng district. (Deori 1997: 15–20)

The writings of these scholars, however, do not portray the actual condition of the Sulungs. We come across an exhaustive study on the Sulungs, which provides a true picture about them, in the writings of C.R. Stonor, who writes,

> The Sulungs live in a tiny, widely separated villages or settlements, each one attached to a particular Nyishi (Daflas) village in an area about 800 sq. km enclosed by the two rivers, viz., the Bharali (Kamme) in the West and the Subansiri to the East. The Nyishi (Dafla) village normally controls the affairs of the Sulung village... . A Sulung household is normally under the overlordship of a particular individual of the

> Nyishi clan involved with his first claim on certain services and right to dispose of the household as whole or part of a trade agreement with the other members of his clan. However, the relationship between the two tribes is more of a feudal arrangement rather than slavery. Within the broad limits of their customary obligation to the Nyishi, the Sulungs are free to carry on with their own way of life. However, there appears to be an implicit undertaking whereby Sulung women are not abducted or molested in any way. Technically, the Sulungs are slaves to the Nyishi in so far as a man may not change his village without permission, and may be sold or exchanged by his master. In effect, however, it is said to be unusual for a Sulung to be disposed of or moved entirely against his will, and payment made is probably more in the nature of compensation for loss of his services or perhaps loss of prestige as his overlord, rather than a purely commercial transaction... Nyishis first claimed over the labour of Sulungs under them. (Stonor 1952: 947–62; Kumar 1982: 82)

Subsequently even R. K. Deori changed his stand on the Sulungs in his monograph and states,

> The Bangnis (Nyishi) have slaves from their own community who are known as *Nyera* (male slave) and *Panne* (female slave). Apart from them, the Sulungs are also slaves to the Bangnis (Nyishi) and Mijis, but their relationship seems more of a feudal arrangement rather than slavery as within the broad limit of their customary obligations. (1982: 55–58)

He further writes,

> Earlier, the mastership of the Bangnis (Nyishi) upon the Sulungs was decided by the default case arising out of non-payment for *Mithun*s, but later on all the Sulungs came under the purview of the Bangni (Nyishi) supremacy by birth, heritage, capture and purchase. (Ibid)

In the discussion of the origin of the Sulungs and their servile status under their Nyishi masters it is important to mention the findings of the Ministerial Committee on Resettlement of Puroik Families. The report states:

> The legend has it that the Puroiks originated from *Khorugkhiya*, their ancestors in heaven and from heaven they descended to earth and

> began to settle in a place where the wild Sago-Palms grow in plenty and from there gradually dispersed in course of time to other parts of the country. [2]

It further states,

> According to the Puroiks...the Nyishis somehow entered their area and made friendship with them and brought them into close contact by persuasion and by offering salt, beads, clothing, daos, local beer, etc. Gradually they made the Puroiks work in their agricultural field and thus, by and by, the Nyishi exploited the Puroik and brought them under their full control. Since then the Puroik have had a number of obligations to the Nyishi and in fact till recent years were virtual serfs of the Nyishi.[3]

Apart from these historical documents, which deal with the Sulungs, the statement of Shri Kameng Dolo, Hon'ble Minister of Home, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, corroborates this aspect of Sulung society when he says, 'It is known to the whole state and nation that 'Sulung' is a traditional serving community in the Nyishi society. This traditional system has come down from time immemorial' (Dolo 2000).

Even though the comparison is slightly far-fetched, here we may mention the system of serfdom in Russia and the displacement and other problems that arose out of the policy of liberation of serfs by Alexander II (1855–81). In Russia during this period nearly all, practically nine-tenth, of the arable land was owned by a small minority like the Czar, the Princess and the Nobles; it was tilled by the millions of Russian who were serfs (Hazen 1959: 581ff). These serfs generally lived in small villages, going out into the fields to till them, returning to their villages at night. The village communities or *mir*s regulated for their members the cultivation of those lands especially allocated to them.

Serfdom was condemned on various grounds. It was morally harmful in that it offended the conscience of the age. Economically it had not proved successful. The Edict of Emancipation (3 March 1861) abolished serfdom throughout the empire freeing millions of serfs, thus winning Alexander the title of 'The Czar Liberator'. Hazen, therefore, very rightly remarks that, 'Personal liberty could

not mean much, when the conditions of earning a livelihood became harder than lighter' (Hazen 1959).

EMANCIPATION OF THE SULUNGS IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

In 1964 the Government of Arunachal Pradesh liberated the Sulung slaves along with the slaves living in some other parts of the territory by paying Rs 500 to the master for each adult slave. The Government also spent a substantial amount for the rehabilitation of the liberated Sulungs. But even after that when in 1996 a survey was conducted by the Government of Arunachal Pradesh at the initiative of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, more than 3,540 bonded labourers (Sulungs) were identified.[4]

Here it should be mentioned that in the system of slavery which was practised by more or less all the major tribes of the state for various socio-economic needs and reasons, the liberation of the slaves in case of other tribes did not pose a serious problem as their cases were individual and the magnitude of the system was not that intense. After liberation, the other slaves merged into or carved out a place of their own in society. Here it may be mentioned that the treatment to the slaves in Arunachal Pradesh was greatly humane unlike in most other parts of the country and elsewhere where they were treated very cruelly and inhumanly. Except for certain social privileges like marriage with the members of the master's family, the slaves more or less enjoyed equal social rights and privileges along with humane treatment.

In the case of the slaves of the Nyishi community however, specially in the areas of the erstwhile Kameng and Subansiri districts, the slave system was so widespread that it gave rise to a big slave population that in course of time came to be known as a community called the Sulungs now called the Puroik community. So while the Government took a decision of liberation of the Sulungs in response to the call of the time and in accordance with the egalitarian ideology of an independent democratic republic, the problems that arose out of liberation was really of a Himalayan nature. While with all

precautions of not advocating the cause of continuation of such an undemocratic system, it must be admitted that the removal of and disturbance to such an age-old system brought its own package of problems for both the masters and the slaves, causing internal displacement.

The problems faced by the masters were mostly of an economic nature surmountable by so many other alternative economic means available at their doorstep by the introduction of planned development of the state by the Government. The problems faced by the slaves on the other hand were of a peculiar nature that caused large scale internal displacement in the socio-economic fronts of the entire Sulung community. This large scale internal displacement may be because of many factors, some of which are given below:

1. The liberated slaves, who also got monetary assistance from the Government like their masters, did not know how to use the money profitably. In most cases, as we have been informed, they handed over the amount to their masters.
2. The Government perhaps did not take adequate follow-up measures required to face the herculean problem of rehabilitation of the Sulungs after having liberated them.
3. The lack of education among the Sulungs is of course the chief cause for their inability to enjoy the fruit of their liberation by adjusting to the changed situation. Failing to adjust to the new situation they continue their old nomadic habit of moving around in the jungles for their subsistence. The old system is on the verge of disappearing but a new system has not emerged to suit the Sulungs and to dissuade them from their old habits.
4. Though the comparison is slightly unpalatable, it is like a cow enroped for grazing in a particular area that does not move for sometime beyond that circle even after deroping. The Sulungs under bondage for centuries refused to move to freer life though in most of the places the masters have liberated them. We have been informed that they still like to identify themselves in the name of their erstwhile masters and they very often come to them for solution of their problems.

> The erstwhile masters also in the changed socio-economic circumstances are generally not ready to continue with the system. As a result, the liberated Sulungs are confronted with a situation of being nowhere—neither old nor new. So the question of displacement of the Sulungs from their old habitats and proper rehabilitation elsewhere in the state where a section of the Sulungs has migrated poses a serious problem in the state requiring urgent attention from all concerned.

To study the problem we recently visited a rehabilitation colony of the Sulungs known as Taniang Colony located between Naharlagun and Itanagar.[5] The Taniang Colony has been named after Tadar Taniang, a former Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, who has very generously donated this land measuring about 3,000 sq m for the rehabilitation of the Sulungs. The land is situated on the raised bank of the Papu river hemmed by the Papu hills just near the National Highway (NH) 52A. The land, it has been informed, was allotted to the first nominated MLA from the Sulung community, Siji Julley (Village Paji, Nyopin), who represented the unrepresented communities in the Legislative Assembly of the state.

On 29 August 2000, the colony was formally inaugurated by Tadar Taniang and is expected to accommodate about 30 families from the Sulungs who have been displaced from their land and migrated to the Capital complex in search of land and an alternative livelihood. As they became frustrated in trying to get land elsewhere in the Capital, it was the initiative of Kipa Babu, the former President of All Nyishi Students' Union (ANSU) and himself an erstwhile master of some Sulungs, which helped create this colony. The colony has become a boon for some displaced persons of the Sulung community who have come here from the East Kameng and Lower Subansiri districts. Hai Yapang, a woman belonging to Sulung community and wife of Hai Talley, who is living in the colony for the last four years, informed us that even though there is provision for 30 families, till date only 20 families have constructed their houses. The others have constructed temporary houses and most of them are still continuing their nomadic habit of moving around in the jungles. They are not interested in constructing semi-permanent

or permanent houses in spite of incentives given to them by the Government. Dittey Khalleng of the colony is a peon, Kushoo Khalling is a police constable and Bupai Puroik is an UD Assistant in the Secretariat who have constructed permanent houses. Some of them have constructed semi-permanent houses. The condition of others is pitiable having practically no means of earning their livelihood. When the writers asked some of the members of the community whether they were the owners of some cattle grazing around, they gave a thunderous ironic laugh which was followed by an answer that 'they don't have enough food to eat, how can they own cattle?'

The colony has been established purely on a voluntary basis and with financial support from some individuals and organizations. We have been informed that no Government assistance has come forward till date for the colony. The inhabitants of the colony are experiencing the lack of basic amenities like link road, water supply, electricity and a school. They have become virtually sandwiched between liberation and lack of proper rehabilitation. As a result even living near a modem capital city, they have continued with their nomadic habit of moving around in the jungles.

A welfare society called 'The All Puroiks Welfare Society' (APWS) has been recently constituted to take up rehabilitation and other welfare work for the Sulungs.[6] According to the Society, the Sulungs freed from the bondage of slavery were roaming in the capital complex without a place for settlement and to rehabilitate some of them, the Taniang colony has been established.

That the present Government is concerned about the problems of the Sulungs can be gauged from the statement of Home Minister Shri Kameng Dolo, which was published in *The Arunachal Times* on 26 August 2000 with the headline 'State Government committed to free Sulungs' (Dolo 2000). He said that as the bond-age system is a curse to humanity, the State Government has been making an all out effort to free and rehabilitate the Sulungs, who have been bonded labourers for ages in various parts of the state, especially in East Kameng district. According to the newspaper, the effort of the Government was evident from the special announcement of the

Home Minister at Seppa on 15 August 2000 (Dolo 2000). In his Independent Day address, Dolo said,

> ...I personally feel that in the modern society this system should also change. They (Sulungs) were very faithful and attached to us as family members. However, they do not make efforts to come to the fold of the society as free members. They still have feeling of inferiority complex. I feel this is high time that they are given all sorts of help to evolve themselves as free human beings and benefit themselves from the social system. Our country is trying to evolve in which all citizens are assured equality, fraternity and justice without discrimination. (Ibid)

The liberation policy of the Government was first initiated in 1964. It is difficult to understand how the old system has still continued in a part of the state. The Government, however, true to its words, should sincerely try to liberate those Sulungs who have not yet been liberated. And in cases where they have already been liberated, it should extend all facilities to rehabilitate the Sulungs who are an internally displaced lot because of the policy which no doubt is a well-intentioned one. The Government should especially extend financial assistance to the organizations in establishing colonies like Taniang Colony and should also establish many more such colonies with all modem facilities to attract the liberated Sulungs to inhabit these. More emphasis should be given on education among the Sulungs so that they are encouraged, as the Home Minister has put it, '...to make efforts to come to the fold of a society as free members'. To lighten the burden of the State Government, more and more NGOs should come forward to face the challenge of this humanitarian work of rehabilitating these huge groups of internally displaced persons caused by the times and demanding change of an age-old social system. In this work the service of the educated section of the Sulung community, though till date only two graduates are there in the community, should be explored to educate their own people to adjust to the modern situation by changing their nomadic habits.

On our visit to the Taniang Colony we have suggested to its patron to create somehow a few model families, which will inspire others to

follow their system. When they will see that their counterparts with a settled cultivation, horticulture, piggery and fishery are living a comfortable, settled life, the others would gradually give up the old nomadic habits and accept a settled way of life. In this way, with the cooperation of all, the rehabilitation of the already liberated Sulungs and would-be-displaced Sulungs can be solved for the all-round development of Arunachal Pradesh.

NOTES

1. For details see V. Elwin, pp. 9, 13.
2. For details see *The Report of the Committee* under the Chairmanship of Shri R.K. Khrimey submitted in 1994.
3. Ibid.
4. For details see A. K. Thakur, which deals with the origin, position and abolition of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh.
5. Field trip to Taniang Colony, Naharlagun on 23 October 2000.
6. This information was furnished by Kipa Babu, Ex. President, ANSU.

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5

Internally Displaced Persons of Changlang District

K. O. Sebastian

Indigenous peoples developed cultures that were in tune with the specific eco-systems and resources in their spatial reality. This accounts for the diversity of human cultures in the world. Any rupture to the indigenous system developed by a particular group of people is a degradation of that society, nay detrimental to its very existence. No wonder nearly all the civil wars after the Second World War were fought to preserve one's own ethnicity and cultural identity in the face of this danger. Arunachal Pradesh is no exception to this. The problem of indigenous people getting marginalized and displaced one way or other is felt very acutely in the district of Changlang. This burning issue has become a thorn in the flesh for the politicians, bureaucrats, social workers and tribal communities for the past few years. This paper proposes to study the problem of displacement of indigenous communities that are about to be engulfed by the migrant population. Thus, our study focuses on the influx of Chakma-Hajong and Tibetan refugees that has greatly displaced the otherwise stable indigenous societies.

Changlang district occupies a unique position in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and in the geopolitics of the entire North East. It is hemmed in between the Tirap and Luhit districts and bounded by 441 km of international border with Myanmar in the North and the state of Assam in the South. Tangsas, Singphos, Tutsas and

Khamtis are the main tribes of the region. Tangsas have been stoutly defending their territory in the southern slopes of the Patkai for the past couple of centuries. They have even resisted the great invasion of the Ahoms during medieval times. The Tangsas and Singphos maintained their territorial integrity taking recourse to their age old method of fighting it out in inter-tribal feuds and wars. One might wonder whether prior to the independence of India these tribes were in perpetual feud and fight for their cherished habitat. The independence of India was seen by these tribes as a new era of peace and security. They looked forward to a greater integration and cohesiveness within the tribes. However their dreams were shattered when the Tibetan, Chakma and Hajong refugees were settled by the Government of India in what they considered as their habitat. The refugee influx has been the prime reason for the displacement of the indigenous community causing major imbalances in its demography, economy, society, polity and even in its very psyche. They have been settled by the Government of India in Miao, Bordumsa and Diyuun circles of the district.

Tibetan refugees emigrated from their homeland in Tibet when the Dalai Lama fled and took asylum in India in 1960. A large number of his followers migrated to India during the period between 1960 and 1965. Extensive stretches of land were allotted by the Government to rehabilitate 215 families of Tibetans in the Miao area of the Changlang district (Dutta Choudhury [ed.] 1980: 96). Major imbalance and displacement of the indigenous population was caused by the influx of Chakmas and Hajongs from the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The Chakmas were displaced in 1960 while building the Kaptai dam over the Karnaphuli river by the government of erstwhile East Pakistan which inundated their hearth and home. Similarly, the Hajongs were forced to leave their homeland following a communal clash in the Mymensingh district. The sudden influx of the Chakma-Hajong and Tibetan refugees was unprecedented, which in its turn induced internal displacement adversely affecting almost every sector of the local society. Today, the refugee communities occupy the villages of Bijoypur, Budhisatta, Avoipur, Chaimu, Dharmpur, Deban, Dapkho, Lama village, Housing area, Gautampur, Havipur, Jyotipur, Jyotsanapur,

Khamapur, Punya Bhumi, Madhupur, Moitripur, Santipur, Sompoi I, Sompoi II, Srirampur, Udaipur, and so on.

The sudden spurt of population in Changlang district has brought about an imbalance and tilt in the demographic scale. It has wide ranging effects on communities such as the Tangsas, Singphos and Khamtis. The phenomenal growth of population in the region since 1961 (after the influx of refugees) and subsequent decline in the indigenous tribal population at least in percentage terms is peculiar to this district alone. Table 5.1 is indicative of the population growth between 1961 and 1971(Dutta Choudhury [ed.] 1980: 43).

Table 5.1 Variation of Population 1961—71

Year	*Total population*			*Tribal population*		
	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
1961	30,601	28,990	59,591	27,423	27,681	55,104
1971	51,774	45,696	97,470	34,493	34,352	68,845

From the above table it appears that the decadal growth of the total population is 63.56 per cent while that of the scheduled tribe population is 24.90 per cent. During the same period of time the non-indigenous population has made a leap from a mere 4,487 to 26,625 in gross terms. With this change in a decade, the tribal population which constituted 92.8 per cent of the district in 1962 was reduced to a mere 34.84 per cent in 1991. A negligible number of the increase could be accounted for by the opening of administrative centres at Nampong, Miao, Bordumsa, Vijayanagar, Diyun and Changlang, besides the influx of traders and bureaucrats from outside the state. Still the influx of a refugee population is primarily responsible for upsetting the demographic balance. In 1969, the Chakmas and the Hajongs in the region numbered around 12,563 in 2,296 hamlets. In 1995, the registered number of refugee population totaled over 65,000 (Government of Arunachal Pradesh 1994: 13). It is a phenomenal growth of 400 per cent over three decades. The entire indigenous population clubbed together will not reach up to the population of the refugees. This has created a panic and fear psychosis among the local population who face the threat of being reduced to a minority in their homeland. Such fears are not

unfounded. The local population often cites the case of Tripura where the tribal population constituted over 65 per cent at the dawn of Indian independence. By 1971, the Bengali population outnumbered that of the tribals and constituted 68 per cent of the population of the state reducing the tribals to mere minorities (Singh 1987: 41). A similar fear lurks in the mind of the local Tangsas and Singphos.

Apart from the psychological fear of being reduced to a minority in their own habitat, they are afraid of losing control over their ancestral land. Initially, the refugees were granted 10,799 ha of land. As the refugee population increased they began to encroach on forest reserves as well as pastoral land (Government of Arunachal Pradesh 1994: 9). Intrusion has damaged the flora and fauna of the Namdapha Tiger Project occupying 24.6 square miles.

According to the 1980 agricultural census, 1,071 hectares of land was leased out—partly or wholly operated by 739 tenants (Directorate of Agriculture 1980: 46). All these factors are sufficient enough to scare the indigenous community of losing their land and being marginalized. Thus there is great fear among them of transfer of land from the indigenous population into the hands of the refugees and migrants. Fearing such a threat, H.S. Dubey, Lieutanant Governor, Arunachal Pradesh wrote a letter on 3 May 1982 to M.L. Kampani, Additional Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs that stated (Ibid.: 39):

> I feel that the matter of granting Indian citizenship to these refugees even after due verification/screening should be taken up only after looking into the possibility of their resettlement elsewhere in India, in order to lessen the burden of these refugees on the local people who are already finding it difficult to subsist on the scarce cultivable land available to them and to restore their confidence and faith in the government.

Local people are marginalized and they are displaced because they are not given what is due to them. Their contribution to ecological well-being comes from the ancient ways of life which respect nature and its laws. Their culture is in grave danger of disappearing entirely because of the deterioration of the environment.

Economic and political marginalization is another major threat to the indigenous community. The indigenous communities are being

reduced to a minority in this particular district. The indigenous population is a minority in the assembly segments of Bordumsa and Diyun-Miao. In the context of a modern nation-state like India, the majority of some sort has the monopoly of power by which the minority will be marginalized and displaced. This threat looms larger if citizenship is granted to the refugees. In such a state of affairs, small tribes like Tangsas, Singphos and Khamtis will be politically displaced and this will eventually lead to the decay of their society. Marginalization in the political field will lead to economic impoverishment and weakening of their society. They have every reason to fear of being pushed to the secondary sources of earning like government jobs, contracts, educational institutions and business. After all political power wields economic clout. The refugee population will have the power and opportunity to further their political and economic agenda to the detriment of the tribes.

Another psychological fear of the indigenous community is that their identity and culture as a unique group will be jeopardized by the presence of the Chakmas, Hajongs and Tibetans. From the very beginning when the British took possession of the hill tract between India and Burma, efforts were made to preserve the tribal society in its pristine form and protect it from any outside interference in its culture, values and socio-religious norms. The refugees pose as a formidable community which will eventually swallow the smaller indigenous tribes. The indigenous people argue that they have nothing in common with the migrant population. Such fears might eventually create an identity crisis within the tribes and will be suicidal to their society. All these psychological fears have accentuated tensions brewing within the communities in the area. The process of displacement of the indigenous communities has begun. The Chakma-Hajong and Tibetan refugee issue has become a burning problem in the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh creating a volatile situation in Bordumsa, Diyun and Miao. The indigenous people argue that the settlement of the refugees was against the prevailing laws and rules of the place. Even the Union Government has gone against the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873. The Government of India has overlooked the powers and functions of the local authority—the village council. Its' decision to grant citizenship and the stay order of

the Supreme Court not to evict the refugees has disturbed the peace and tranquility of the otherwise peaceful state.

After a long drawn debate over the issue, every bona fide citizen of the state comes up with the pertinent question: Is there a solution to this vital issue? Constitutional experts, government officials and the indigenous people have been battling with the issue and it has become a major concern of the entire state. No one has come up with an amicable solution to the problem. The State Government argues that it has been a temporary arrangement to settle the refugees in the state and therefore, the Central Government is committed to resettle them elsewhere outside the state, while the Central Government is of the opinion that the refugees were settled permanently after notifying the indigenous people. The case is also placed before the Supreme Court. The Apex court has given a stay order on the eviction of the refugees. However, since 1996, the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) had taken up the issue to evict the people concerned. It has organized mass agitation in the state to conscientise the people and compel the government for immediate solution to solve the issue. According to the statement of AAPSU, the third and the fourth phases of the agitation programme commenced from January 2001 (*North East Times* 4 October 2000). Meanwhile, an amicable solution to the problem was nowhere in sight. This is an issue that cannot be resolved without the consent and the will of the people concerned. A concerted effort by the indigenous people, the refugees, the Central and the State Governments alone can reach a near solution to the problem.

Apart from the main focus of the refugee issue, mushrooming of tea gardens and the presence of innumerable timber mills have contributed much to the displacement of the indigenous communities. It is a subtle form of marginalization, the effect of which will be seen in the years to come. Tea and forest-based industries are labour intensive units for which they depend on outside work force. There are 13 major gardens registered besides innumerable mini-gardens started by a number of people. Most of the land is leased or acquired, which in turn deprives the whole community of their farmland and also has led the way to privatization of landownership. There are 32 forest-based mills in the district (Government of

Arunachal Pradesh 1996: 56). Though the mills have been closed for the time being, the labourers still hang around the vicinity grabbing any opportunity available for survival. It is a typical example of development without sustainability. Further, while feeding the mills with tons of timber, it has destroyed the ecological balance of the area. Nampong, Jairampur, Miao and Manmao regions have already experienced unprecedented soil erosion and flood in 1997.

The untenable progress in the name of economic development is going to marginalize the local population. The traditional societies had a direct relationship with the resources of the land around them, and were in the position to match their carrying capacity. It was only when these patterns were disrupted by influx of refugees and import of a labour force for industrialization that the increase in population became a threat to the existence of the indigenous people. Modernization has its own share in the displacement of the people in the region. Modernization and developmental projects create unprecedented material wealth for the few. But it is creating poverty unknown in the past. Emerging social elites, politicians, businessmen and contractors pocket much of the developmental benefits. Thus, the benefits do not trickle down to the ordinary villager. He is further pushed down to the bottom of the emerging social hierarchy. The development has replaced a relaxed natural sense of time with calendrical time in which each time will have to be accounted for in terms of its contribution to production and utility. Modernization has given meaning to the individual, over the group—the core of indigenous society. Group norms have given way to individuality, eventually marginalizing the soul of the tribe itself. Egalitarian society is being replaced by the egocentric individuality. The elite have their own economic and political agenda to the detriment of the majority in the society, resulting in the dismemberment of its core values, social structure and collective responsibility. It has already spread the seed of discord and discontentment.

Tension is mounting between the indigenous people and the refugees. Desperation at this stage could lead to armed struggle in the future, creating a volatile situation. The indigenous population has already sensed the passivity of the Central Government to solve the refugee problem and could be lured away to anti-national activities.

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Section II
Assam

6

Environment-induced IDPs: An Appraisal

Nazmin Banu Islam

This paper proposes to underline the importance of the environment-induced population displacement in Assam. During the last few decades, it has been experiencing severe internal displacement induced by the erosion of the banks of the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Due to excessive rainfall during the monsoons, the state experiences floods almost every year causing large-scale damage and suffering. The monsoon generally starts from April–May and persists up to mid-October. The rainfall in May and June is higher than the rainfall in the subsequent period during July and August. Again the rainfall during the last part of the monsoon which falls in September–October is often higher than the rainfall of the earlier periods. This causes early or late floods as the case may be. Rainfall in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Bhutan is also a factor that causes floods in Assam since the major rivers like the Brahmaputra and the Barak and their important tributaries have their sources and major portions of catchment areas in those states. Every year thousands of people are displaced in the plains of Assam as victims of perennial flood and subsequent riverbank erosion. Though perennial in nature, this problem has failed to attract the attention of social scientists and the media. This paper is an attempt at analyzing this problem of environment-induced internal displacement caused by the annual

floods in Assam. The research work done so far is far from adequate. For our convenience this paper takes the period from 1987–2000 as its case of reference. The years of 1987 and 1988 experienced a larger magnitude of damage and devastation than the years 1989 and 1990 did. A case study of the year 1990 shows that in this particular year more than one million people have been affected by riverbank erosion. The districts affected are given in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 District-wise Distribution of Number of Villages and Families Affected by Riverbank Erosion in 1990

District	*No. of villages affected by erosion*	*No. of families affected by erosion*
Dhubri	71	5,483
Dhemaji	25	5,000
Goalpara	62	3,108
Barpeta	–	1,695
Bongaigaon	46	905
Cachar	13	436
Jorhat	25	278

Source: Department of Revenue, Government of Assam.

Table 6.1 shows that a total of 242 villages were affected by erosion whereas a total of 16,905 families were victimized. Now assuming that a family consists of six members on an average, we can infer that in each district thousands of people have been affected. At the time of preparing this paper, the data available shows that in the Majuli sub-division, a population of 23,000 people in a land area of 175,000 bighas have been affected (Government of Assam 2000). In Sumaimari, Alimur Mising gaon and Maajor Chapari a total of 54 families had shifted themselves to a nearby embankment road as the land on which they dwelt was eroded by the second wave of floods. In Dhemaji district, 2,979 inmates took shelter in five relief camps. In Dibrugarh, a total of 132 families affected by riverbank erosion took shelter in three relief camps. In Hatsingimari sub-division of Dhubri district, erosion affected a population of 71,200 in the Salmara Mancachar Circle. From Table 6.2, we can infer the extent of damage caused by the first two waves of flood in the year 2000. A population of 910,186 persons has been affected.

The sufferings of the people who have been forced to leave their homes and seek shelter in the relief camps established by the government are incalculable.

Table 6.2 Extent of Damage to Crops and Population in the 15 Districts of Assam for the Year 2000

<table>
<tr><th>Name of the districts affected</th><th>No. of villages affected</th><th>Land area affected</th><th>Crop area affected</th><th>Population affected</th><th>No. of relief camps</th><th>Human lives lost</th></tr>
<tr><td>Dhemaji</td><td rowspan="15">1,840</td><td rowspan="15">1,930,901 bighas</td><td rowspan="15">384,517 bighas</td><td rowspan="15">910,186</td><td rowspan="15">49</td><td rowspan="15">2 due to flood
11due to landslide</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lakhimpur</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tinsukia</td></tr>
<tr><td>Jorhat</td></tr>
<tr><td>Dibrugarh</td></tr>
<tr><td>Kokajhar</td></tr>
<tr><td>Bongaigaon</td></tr>
<tr><td>Darrang</td></tr>
<tr><td>Karimganj</td></tr>
<tr><td>Dhubri</td></tr>
<tr><td>Kamrup</td></tr>
<tr><td>Goalpara</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sonitpur</td></tr>
<tr><td>Morigaon</td></tr>
<tr><td>Barpeta</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Report on Flood in Assam–2000. Guwahati: Department of Revenue, Government of Assam.

A study of the riverbank erosion of the Dikhow river, a tributary of the Brahmaputra, will help us understand the depth of the problem. The erosion of the Dikhow river has not only washed away vast areas of Amguribat—an area situated in the western outskirts of Sibsagar town in upper Assam, but also threatened the existence of the RCC Dikhow bridge which was constructed in the year 1998 at an enormous cost. As there was no 'guide bandh', vast areas at the western end of the new bridge had already gone into the river and vast areas are on the brink of being eroded by the strong currents of the river Dikhow—a tributary of the river Brahmaputra. A large number of 'pucca' residential houses are just hanging on the precipice of the eroded bank. The intensity of erosion had been so severe that

even the western end of the bridge itself has been endangered. It has been learnt from reliable sources that the responsibility of constructing the 'guide bandh' of up to 45 m on both sides of the bridge fell upon the Public Works Department. As a result of absence of 'guide bandh' within the specified 45 m range on both sides of the bridge at the western end, the Flood Control Department is also not taking any step to protect the area beyond the 45 m range. The explanation given by the concerned authority is that the protective measures if adopted will not be effective unless the Public Works Department take protective anti-erosion measures within the specified 45 m. Thus, we observe how the concerned departments within the state machinery shift their responsibility on one another. In this manner lakhs of people are affected due to state negligence and the popular perception is that the irresponsibility and corruption within the state machinery have further aggravated the problem.

ROLE OF THE STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS

The problem of riverbank erosion is not a recent one. Here, is an excerpt from a newspaper which appeared on August 24, 1945.

> Considerable damage to 'asu' 'aman' crops has been caused by floods of the Brahmaputra in Barpeta sub-division and in more than eight villages of South Kamrup. In Goalpara district numbers of cattle were washed away in the south-bank area of the Brahmaputra. Villages were submerged under water, thatched houses were washed away, and many people rendered homeless had to go without food for days together with their wives and children. The suffering of the people was great. More than 400 families in parts of the Tezpur sub-division are reported to be in distress due to floods of the Bhara/i. The village that has been most adversely affected is Balijan.

In the past the state would provide land to the people displaced by erosion. But in the recent decades, the state finds it difficult to continue with this due to ever increasing pressure of population on land. Only meagre compensation is provided by the state, for fully damaged houses it is Rs 4,000 per family and Rs 1,500 per family in case of partially damaged houses (Government of Assam).

The Government has failed to provide us with any data relating to rehabilitation of the displaced people. It is very difficult to fix the quantum of these Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as they are not visible. Deprived of their homestead and cultivable land, they migrate to nearby towns and cities. There is no record of their occupational diversity. We may assume that the educated IDPs are in an advantageous position to rehabilitate them and find out alternative sources of income. But what about others? This question of the IDPs cannot be separated from poverty. It is only obvious that they have been added to the large army of already existing poor, landless people and marginal peasants.

Apart from the state, very few NGOs are engaged in the state for the rehabilitation of these erosion-induced IDPs. Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD-NE) general secretary Sanjoy Ghose, an NGO activist, initiated a series of developmental projects in the riverine island of Majuli in upper Assam. He unfortunately lost his life reportedly at the hands of the militant outfit United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). The work initiated by this NGO received a major setback, thus sending the message that 'others' are not allowed in the land of Assam and the 'asomiyas'.

CONCLUSION

Despite the perennial nature of the problem, the state has failed in framing an effective policy for the rehabilitation of the IDPs. The Government authorities do not maintain any 'data bank' and therefore cannot provide any record relating to the rehabilitation trend of the IDPs. The state restricts its role to the distribution of alms and a meagre compensation for the thatched houses that the affected persons have lost. But, the Government is silent about their access to the natural resources on which they depend for their livelihood. A single wave of flood or erosion is all that has made them rootless. Displacement has forced them to be scattered, voiceless and unorganized. Being rootless, the IDPs are politically insignificant for they do not count as votes in their new areas of resettlement. Hence the state is oblivious to their appalling existence. Moreover, being

scattered, they remain hidden from public focus and fail to attract the attention of the media. The state does not have any long-term policy either to protect the IDPs or to provide any relief through emergency disaster management policy. Therefore we conclude that the state at present is in deep slumber. Who will wake up the state?

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7

Riverbank Erosion Affected People in the Kamrup District

Aparna Goswami and Baneswar Das

Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, natural or human-made disasters and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (United Nations 1999). In the post-colonial period, Assam experienced a lot of ethnic violence resulting in the language movement (1960), the Assam Movement on foreign nationals (1979–85) etc., which resulted in the displacement of the affected people and till today these displaced persons are loosely termed in Assam as 'refugees'. According to Monirul Hussain: 'The communal legacy of colonialism and later the identity movements contributed immensely towards massive internal displacement of marginalized groups during the last 50 years'. Assam is also affected by several natural calamities like earthquakes in 1897 and 1950, floods almost every year and of late the erosion (that is not altogether unrelated to the two mentioned above) that took a violent turn with the commencement of the 21st century. However, displacement occurring due to these natural calamities did not get proper attention as that of the 'refugees' mentioned earlier. In this paper we will make an attempt to understand the plight of the people affected by the erosion of

the south bank of the Brahmaputra—particularly under Palashbari (25 km from Guwahati) and Chhaygaon (50 km from Guwahati) Revenue Circles in Kamrup District.

Erosion is a natural process by which rock and soil are broken loose from the earth's surface at one location and move to another. Erosion is usually a slow and gradual process that occurs over thousands or millions of years. However, the process may be sped up either by human activities or by natural calamities like earthquakes and chronic flooding. It is a part and parcel of riverine activities that affect mostly the habitats of floodplains as the erosion of the mighty river Brahmaputra has shown. To speak in geographer's terminology, the river Brahmaputra even in its matured stage has a very strong undercurrent, which eventually digs its bed. Out of the total length (2,880 km) of the river Brahmaputra, a stretch of 1,625 km passes through Tibet, 196 km through Arunachal Pradesh, 722 km through Assam and 337 km through Bangladesh. The river, having a width varying from 3 to 19 km, flows in a relatively narrow valley of an average width of 80 km. The floodplains of the river cover almost 40 km of the valley. It has a maximum discharge of 72,794 m/sec at Pandu and the average annual sediment yield is about 527 million tonnes (1978–91) (ARSAC 1989).

The erosion of the river Brahmaputra took a serious turn after the disastrous earth quake of 1950, although the process was tangible right from the earthquake in 1897 which raised its bed making it incapable of holding the maximum discharge during summer. D. C. Goswami made an extensive study on the morphology and behaviour of the Brahmaputra river, based on which an analysis was made to determine the cause of erosion. The reasons are either scouring of the upper bank materials by strong currents during high flow or by oversteepening of the bank materials due to migration of the thalweg closer to the bank during falling stages of the river. This process ultimately creates a cantilever type formation on the surface of the bank, which eventually fails. High moisture content, low proportion of clay and good sorting of the bank materials make them highly susceptible to erosion by the river. Within the 722 km long Assam section of the river, there are several stretches where the rate of bankline migration is exceedingly high and the changes

in channel configuration are quite drastic. In such actively eroding sections, the rate of bankline recession may be in the order of several hundred metres in the course of a single year thereby creating an extremely serious hazard for scores of people living in the densely populated arable land in the adjoining floodplains. Erosion becomes more acute in the downstream of Goalpara, Palashbari—Gumi, Mariahola and Mathola on the south bank and Mathmara, Majuli, Sonarighat, Airingmara, Tezpur and Mukalmua on the north bank. Morphological studies conducted by the North Eastern Council (NEC) on erosion of the Brahmaputra (1993) recognized the following sites of the valley where active erosion is going on.

South Bank:
Nagaghuli Oakland area near Dibrugarh.
Maijan Mathola.
Hatisaal Nemati area near Jorhat.
Marihala near Bokakhat.
Lahorighat—Mairabari area near Morigaon.
Palashbari town area.
Gumi—Kalatoli area.
Fakirganj South Salmara area.
Sukhchar Bazar area.

North Bank:
Sonarighat area at Sonarighat.
Matmara area near Dhemaji.
Gamirighat area near confluence of Subansiri.
Bhoirabpad and Bihaguri Mouza.
Howlighat Mukalmua area.
Baghbar to Bohori near Barpeta.

As already mentioned, erosion started in the area under study since 1897 but it took a serious turn after the earthquake of 1950 as a result of braided riverbed due to large-scale sedimentation generated by the earthquake. The nodality that developed at the upstream end of the Dakhala hill, which is about 25 km, and is bounded by rocky hills on either side is another cause of erosion

in the area. At a point 1 km downstream of the Saraighat bridge, the downstream end of the nodal reach, the Brahmaputra deposits a part of its silt load and fans out forming an island in the middle of the river. The major part of the discharge moves towards the north and forms an embayment before encountering the Ghatia hill, which acts as a natural spur. So, the river deflects in the southwest direction and meets the Dakhala hill situated on the southern channel at a point just upstream of Palashbari town. Though the existence of the Dakhala hill arrested further erosion at that point upstream of the hill where Palashbari town is situated, the areas downstream of the hill remain unprotected. On the other hand, on the northern bank of the deflected channel from the Ghatia hill, continuous silt deposition takes place during the flood period, reducing the water-way of the river which exerts high pressure on the southern bank causing heavy erosion. Significantly, a maximum of 7.6 km bankline shift occurred during 1911–88 in the Gumi area. However, other factors, if any, as the cause of erosion, particularly for our samples of Palashbari and Chhaygaon are left to the experts.

As the floodplain is naturally fertile, people usually prefer to live in it. The area of our study comprises Palashbari (see Table 7.1) and Chhaygaon (see Table 7.2) Revenue Circles where Dakhin Sarubongsar and Pub-Chamaria Mouzas are badly affected and Rampur and Chayani Mouzas partially affected by the erosion process. In Dakhin Sarubangsar 34 villages are affected by erosion where 29 villages are completely eroded and five are partially affected. Again, in the Pub-Chamaria Mouza out of 33 villages 26 are fully eroded while seven are partially eroded. In Rampur Mouza, the number of erosion-affected villages was found to be eight out of which six have submerged in the riverbed itself. Moreover, Palashbari, the nerve centre and business town of the south Kamrup, is another victim of the erosion process. However, the villages upstream of the Brahmaputra river extending to Dakhala Hill that is Hudumpur, Palashbari and Sadilapur have been affected by erosion since the onset of the erosion process in and around the river Brahmaputra. (6794.58 ha and 6997.2 ha of land have eroded till 1999 in Palashbari and Chhaygaon areas respectively). In Palashbari circle Keotpara, Gabardia, Borbhui and Jaipur villages eroded before 1971 while Futuri-I, Futuri-II, Abhipara, Mahmaridia and Rangaduar villages eroded during 1970

to 1990. Similarly, in the Chhaygaon circle, while village Khetrapara, Balagaon-I and Balagaon-II eroded before 1970, the villages like, Borakhat, Nayapara and Dakardia eroded between 1971 and 1990. Thus from the data in Table 7.1, we find that the erosion became more intense during the 1990s as most of the villages were affected in this period. It is worth mentioning that some of the eroded villages such as Keotpara, Gabardia, Segaratari, Kajalartari, Dariatari, Kalardia, Saraimari, Bhurakatapam, Kalapani-I, Kalapani-II, Pagladia and Bhatkhowadia of Palashbari circle have been transformed into riverine *char* (embankment). Likewise, some of the eroded villages of Chhaygaon circle (Table 7.2) namely, Saralarsutipam, Sitalmari, Lohikata, Baghmara, Baghbar Gohaipara, Ujan Duramari, Naljuhipathar, Khalihamari, Dighaldobapathar, Nayapam, Khetrapara, Kaladiatup, Batehidia, Deuridoba and Kalardia also followed the same pattern. Year-wise breakup of erosion affected area from 1969 to 1999 in Dakhin Sarubangsar Mouza amounts to be 8336.2 ha (see Table 7.3).

It may be noted that the villages mentioned above are thickly populated as it is the fertile floodplain. Interestingly, no agency could keep proper accounts of the numbers of affected people. From the available government records and field surveys we are trying to infer the number of erosion-affected people. As per government records (see Table 7.1), the number of affected families in the Palashbari circle is 5,521 only. Unfortunately there is no government record about the numbers of affected families of villages like Keotpara, Gabardia, Mahmaridia, Sengertari, Kajalartari, Dabiatari, Kalardia, Saraimari, Bhurakatapam, Kalapani-I, Kalapani-II, Pagladia, Bhatkhowadia, Chapathuri, Karipara, Borbhui, Jaipur, Hudumpur, Palashbari Town and Sadilapur. However, from our data collected through a field survey, it is found that about 19,678 people are affected by erosion. This list does not include the number of affected families from the villages like Bhurakatapam, Kalapani-I, Kalapani-II, Pagladia, Bhatkhowadia, Dakhala, Chapathuri, Karipara, Borbhui, Jaipur, Hudumpur, Palashbari Town and Sadilapur. In Chhaygaon circle records only 871 (see Table 7.2) families are mentioned and there is no data on the number of affected population in the eroded villages of Choudhurypara, Dighaldobapathar, Kalatalipathar, Maghuwabilarpathar, Nayapara, Khetrapara, Kaladiatop, Batehidia,

Table 7.1 Erosion Affected Area and Population under Palashbari Revenue Circle

S. No.	*Name of villages*	*Area (ha) as on 1911–70*	*Area (ha) as on 1971*	*Area (ha) as on 1991*	*Erosion affected area upto 1999*	*No. of house-holds as on 1971*	*No. of families as on 1991*	*Popu-lation upto 1971*	*Popu-lation as on 1971*	*Popu-lation as on 1991*	*Erosion affected popu-lation*	*As per government record*	
												Affected families	*Families rehabilitate*
1.	Jarabari (P)	–	259	259	24.1	53	36	–	426	294	–	67	67
2.	Futuri-I	125	125	NA	125	263	120	–	1,840	778	1,840	500	424
3.	Futuri-II	138	138	NA	138	48	10	–	341	55	341	300	240
4.	Futuri-III	114.5	114.5	114.5	114.50	176	37	–	1,056	398	1,056	200	160
5.	Dhalipar (P)	–	283.50	355	57.60	177	390	–	1,058	3,903	–	3	Nil
6.	Abhipara	214.10	214.10	NA	255	218	NP	–	1,529	NP	1,529	251	212
7.	Bartari	227.50	227.50	–	185.60	152	NP	658	905	NP	905	218	218
8.	Keotpara	97.40	NA	832	237.30	NP	NP	401	NP	NP	401	NA	NA
9.	Gabardia	167.20	NA	NA	237.50	10	NP	632	62	NP	632	NA	NA
10.	Bangsar (P)	–	54	54	28.90	42	54	–	300	311	300	73	22
11.	Jarabari (RP)	–	231.70	231.7	218.50	80	3	–	564	12	564	205	201
12.	Kandalpara	72	72	72	72	NP	NP	287	NP	NP	287	48	48
13.	Biturtari	–	168.90	168.9	168.90	55	NP	–	386	NP	386	226	226
14.	Mahmaridia	133.6	133.6	NA	131.7	NP	NP	364	NP	NP	364	NA	NA
15.	Baniapara	–	288.30	288.3	288.30	211	NP	–	1,479	NP	1,479	250	250

16.	Bherbheri	238	226	226	226	3	NP	150	15	NP	150	62	62
17.	Baghardia	194.3	194.4	194.4	192.3	NP	NP	687	NP	NP	687	205	205
18.	Rangaduar	133.6	133.6	NA	133.6	NP	NP	539	NP	NP	539	95	95
19.	Baghardia Pathar	154.6	134.50	134.5	134.50	NP	NP	398	NP	NP	398	35	35
20.	Guimara (P)	–	149.4	149.4	101.3	319	257	–	1,914	1,529	–	260	70
21.	Karipara	170.8	170.9	170.9	170.9	82	18	–	497	110	497	190	190
22.	Kandulimari	–	314.7	314.7	104.1	72	71	–	504	480	504	150	125
23.	Panikhaiti	245.7	279.4	320	80	118	181	376	712	1,236	376	5	5
24.	Mollatari	–	192	192	206	32	NP	–	192	NP	192	70	70
25.	Sengertari	230	230	230	230	–	96	198	–	703	198	NA	NA
26.	Kajalartari	155.4	155.4	–	155.4	7	NP	311	45	NP	311	NA	NA
27.	Dabiatari	294	294	294	294	NP	64	401	NP	317	401	NA	NA
28.	Kalardia	–	207.4	155	207.4	NP	98	–	NP	415	496	NA	NA
29.	Saraimari	178.5	178.5	178.5	178.5	13	19	334	76	73	334	NA	NA
30.	Bhurakatapam	165	165	165	165	4	40	–	22	337	–	NA	NA
31.	Kalapani-I	296.7	377.8	377.8	377.8	–	298	–	–	1,814	–	NA	NA
32.	Kalapani-II	81	81	81	81	–	81	–	–	501	–	NA	NA
33.	Pagladia	60.7	61	134.8	134.8	–	103	–	–	659	–	NA	NA
34.	Bhatkhowadia	19.8	19.8	121	121	NP	392	–	NP	2,458	–	NA	NA
35.	Dakhala (P)	–	271	309.4	55	407	625	–	2,442	3,806	–	90	90
36.	Chulikata (P)	–	184	14.2	33.5	130	413	–	784	2,832	784	100	100
37.	Simina-I & II	–	558	450	353	329	NP	–	3,146	NP	3,146	600	580

(*Table 7.1 continued*)

(*Table 7.1 continued*)

S. No.	*Name of villages*	*Area (ha) as on 1911–70*	*Area (ha) as on 1971*	*Area (ha) as on 1991*	*Erosion affected area upto 1999*	*No. of house-holds as on 1971*	*No. of families as on 1991*	*Popu-lation upto 1971*	*Popu-lation as on 1971*	*Popu-lation as on 1991*	*Erosion affected popu-lation*	*As per government record*	
												Affected families	*Families rehabilitate*
38.	Chapathuri	–	667.4	303	294.5	199	177	–	1385	1075	–	250	240
39.	Karipara	–	–	–	96.7	–	–	–	–	–	–	300	275
40.	Borbhui	–	NA	113	112.5	NP	NP	–	NP	NP	–	150	140
41.	Singimari	170	170	170	170	2	NP	581	11	NP	581	100	85
42.	Jaipur	–	NA	55.5	55.5	NP	NP	–	NP	NP	–	100	100
43.	Hudumpur (P)	261	261.2	176	1.07	242	177	–	1,452	1,028	–	5	5
44.	Palashbari Town (P)	–	266	–	22.03	620	–	–	4,162	4,684	–	150	150
45.	Palashbari Town (P)	–	–	–	14.4	–	–	–	–	–	–	70	70
46.	Sadilapur (P)	–	107.7	104.5	9.88	72	58		431	319	–	193	193
	Total		3,385.8	–	6,794.58	4,136	3,818	6,317	27,736	30,127	19,678	5,521	4,953

Source: Palashbari Revenue Circle.

Table 7.2 Erosion Affected Area and Population under Chhaygaon Revenue Circle

S.No.	Name of villages	*Area (ha) as on 1911–70*	*Area (ha) as on 1971*	*Area (ha) as on 1991*	*Erosion affected area upto 1999*	*No. of households as on 1971*	*No. of families as on 1991*	*Population upto 1971*	*Population as on 1971*	*Population as on 1991*	*No. of affected families*
1.	Saralarsuti Pam	–	125.5	–	125.5	48	–	–	293	–	70
2.	Sitalmari	95	152.2	–	152.2	Nil	–	–	NP	–	NP
3.	Lohikata	132.6	127	–	212.2	Nil	–	–	NP	–	NP
4.	Baghmara	–	168	258	168	132	182	–	792	1,172	187
5.	Baghbar Gohaipara	–	137	137	137	49	7	–	298	40	49
6.	Tekeliphuta	–	244	–	325.7	103	32	–	620	199	71
7.	Ujan Duramari	83.7	222.6	–	308.6	62	–	–	371	–	62
8.	Duramari	169	270	–	270	3	–	–	17	–	3
9.	Naljuhipathar	157.5	251.8	–	251.8	Nil	–	–	NP	–	NP
10.	Khalihamari	–	170.8	170.9	170.9	79	NP	–	558	NP	79
11.	Borakhat	–	280.5	NA	321.6	225	101	–	1,349	635	124
12.	Choudhuripara	–	265.6	343.4	265.6	31	314	–	186	2,108	NA
13.	Dighaldobapathar	–	137	–	55.7	20	–	–	121	–	NA
14.	Kalatalipathar	144.4	226.7	230.8	230.8	65	158	–	393	1,036	NA
15.	Maghuwabilar Pathar	157.3	210.5	–	251.8	Nil	–	–	NP	–	NA
16.	Nayapara	160.5	256.7	NA	256.7	51	117	–	309	714	NA
17.	Khetrapara	138.1	NA	220.7	220.7	Nil	115	–	NP	592	NA

(*Table 7.2 continued*)

(*Table 7.2 continued*)

S.No.	*Name of villages*	*Area (ha) as on 1911–70*	*Area (ha) as on 1971*	*Area (ha) as on 1991*	*Erosion affected area upto 1999*	*No. of households as on 1971*	*No. of families as on 1991*	*Popu-lation upto 1971*	*Popu-lation as on 1971*	*Popu-lation as on 1991*	*No. of affected families*
18.	Kaladiatop	102.5	166.8	170.1	170.1	15	65	–	93	464	NA
19.	Batehidia	132.6	214	163.6	163.6	121	244	–	848	1,599	NA
20.	Deuridoba	177.7	243.7	284.3	284.3	6	41	–	35	206	NA
21.	Kalardia	–	245.7	245.7	229.7	70	79	–	496	582	NA
22.	Bhogedia–I	–	151.8	192	151.8	7	NP	–	40	NP	NA
23.	Bhogedia–II	–	43.3	43.3	43.3	6	19	–	37	106	NA
24.	Salmara Pathar	163.6	221	–	–	37	NP	–	221	–	NA
25.	Tapar Pathar	–	282.6	261.6	282.6	78	255	–	467	1,613	NA
26.	Bhakuamari	–	299	452.8	460.8	161	75	–	1,126	460	86
27.	Barbhitha Kacharipara	–	163	326.4	326.4	220	228	–	1,542	1,827	NA
28.	Jahirpur	–	273	273	273	200	303	–	1,401	1,856	NA
29.	Hohowa Pathar	–	126	126	126	105	1	–	662	12	104
30.	Balagaon–I	59.5	NA	95	95	Nil	129	–	NP	1,032	NA
31.	Balagaon–II	143.6	NA	206	230.3	Nil	98	–	NP	586	NA
32.	Dekardia	–	246.5	NA	246.5	36	NP	–	217	NP	36
33.	Alikash	–	189	189	189	155	182	–	934	1,102	NA
	Total		6,033.7	4,389.6	6,997.2	2,085	2,745	–	13,426	17,941	871

Source: Chhaygaon Revenue Circle.

Table 7.3 Year-wise Breakup of Erosion Affected Areas: Dakhin Sarubongshar Mouza from 1969 to 1999

S. No.	*Year*	*Eroded land*		
		Bighas	*Kathas*	*Lechas*
1.	1969–70	2,146	1	2
2.	1970–71	1,500	1	10
3.	1971–72	825	1	2
4.	1972–73	1,050	4	5
5.	1973–74	2,255	2	10
6.	1974–75	5,740	1	5
7.	1975–76	2,050	1	10
8.	1976–77	457	2	2
9.	1977–78	580	2	10
10.	1978–79	370	2	5
11.	1979–80	2,150	1	10
12.	1980–81	560	2	5
13.	1981–82	779	1	1
14.	1982–83	5,970	1	12
15.	1983–84	2,500	2	1
16.	1984–85	3,772	3	0
17.	1985–86	2,122	2	11
18.	1986–87	150	1	12
19.	1987–88	570	3	7
20.	1988–89	5,890	4	2
21.	1989–90	4,360	2	0
22.	1990–91	2,430	1	10
23.	1991–92	3,570	1	0
24.	1992–93	580	4	3
25.	1993–94	4,560	1	2
26.	1994–95	2,128	4	5
27.	1995–96	2,582	2	7
28.	1996–97	540	1	0
29.	1997–98	34	2	5
30.	1998–99	25	2	17
	Total	62,257	4	14

Source: Palashbari Revenue Circle.

Deuridoba, Kalardia, Bhogedia-I, Bhogedia-II, Salmara Pathar, Bhakuamari, Barbhitha Kacharipara, Jahirpur, Balagaon-I,Balagaon-II and Alikash. On the other hand, by checking Census data, it is observed that there were no records of population (before 1971)

of the villages like, Keotpara, Kandalpara, Mahmaridia, Baghardia, Rangaduar, Baghardia, Dabiatari, Kalardia, Bhatkhowadia, Borbhui and Jaipur. There was a drastic reduction of number of families living in the villages such as Futuri-I, Futuri-II, Futuri-III, Jarabari (RP), Guimara, Karipara and Hudumpur during the period 1971–91. Bordaloi on his own assessed the loss due to erosion during the period 1988 to 1995 as Rs 37,542,525 in the areas mentioned above where only 411 ha of land got eroded and 601 families were affected. Apart from the private loss, a good amount of public property namely, Office building of Palashbari Town Committee, the E&D office, the Dak Bunglow, the Telephone Exchange, the State Dispensary, the Transport office, the Post Office, the Forest Office, the PWD office, the reputed R.B. High School along with its 7.23 ha of land and about 3 km of National Highway (NH) 37 eroded in Palashbari Town. Thus, several hundreds of crores (1 crore = 10,000,000) of rupees had to be lost due to erosion in the area under review.

Our study area had a population of 41,162 people as on 1971, which increased to 48,068 as on 1991. Despite agriculture being the main occupation for the habitants of the area, the recurrent flood accompanied by erosion has reduced the number of cultivators by 14.98 per cent (as per the 1961 census figures) in Palashbari Circle and 26.62 per cent in Chhaygaon circle. Around 6.94 per cent and 1.27 per cent of the total population from Palashbari and Chhaygaon respectively are engaged in other services as mill workers and petty traders. A microscopic (1.79 per cent and 0.54 per cent) work as agricultural labour. The literacy percentage as on 1971 among the population was found to be 27.7 per cent and 13.25 per cent, respectively. The population is composed of mainly caste Hindu majority, Muslims and Neo-Asomiya Muslims in the *char* villages. The Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) population in Palashbari and Chhaygaon are 10.63 per cent (SC) and 0.5 per cent (ST) and 1.58 per cent (SC) and (ST) zero per cent, respectively. Fishing is the main occupation of the Scheduled Caste people and all of them are marginal fisherman. Internal road communication system of the entire area is very pitiable excepting for the villages like, Sadilapur, Hudumpur and Dakhala adjoining NH 37.

PLIGHT AND REHABILITATION

The affected people have lost their immovable properties and have been converted into virtual paupers by erosion. Through a field interaction with the erosion victims as well as by collecting government records, an endeavour was made to assess the actual plight of the victims. We also made an effort to know about the rehabilitation measures undertaken by the government in this context.

What we could gather from such erosion victims of the aforesaid areas is that landlessness has become a major problem for the people who were prosperous farmers in the yesteryears. Even the people who have been rehabilitated by providing small plots of land to build their hutments complained about inadequate arable land to sustain their livelihood. We have already mentioned that erosion occurred throughout the last century in the area under review and a huge quantum of loss had to be incurred by the affected people. According to Michael Cernea: 'Expropriation of land removes the main foundation upon which people's productive systems, commercial activities, and livelihoods are constructed. This is the principal form of de-capitalization and pauperisation of displaced people, as they lose both natural and man-made capital' (Cernea 2000). Table 7.4 gives us a clear picture on the nature of rehabilitation programmes. Government data on rehabilitation programmes would substantiate our finding and their impact on the victim's socio-economic conditions. The record book of Palashbari R.C. shows that 541 families are yet to be rehabilitated. However, government has proposed the schemes on rehabilitation as discussed next.

In 1997 a proposal to rehabilitate 61 families of Sapathuri village, 131 of Guimara, 36 of Sulikata Pathar and 114 of Futuri-I, II and III was forwarded to Revenue Department by the Palashbari R.C. The reserve land of Jiakur No. I village under dag No. 379, Jiakur No. II under dag No. 1 and Sulikata Pathar under dag No. 252 were earmarked for these 342 erosion-affected families. Ironically the proposal turned out to be unfeasible because the earmarked land was too swampy for habitation of these people. Naturally the victims refused to accept it. A few families decided to settle in the government-allotted land but had to abandon the idea in the

Table 7.4 Rehabilitation of Erosion Affected People

S. No.	*Name of eroded village*	*No. of families*	*Rehabilitated location*	*Year of rehabilitation*	*Rehabilitated government/self*	*Quantity of land allotted*	*Remarks*
1.	Lakhitari, Simina, Sapathuri	200	Makeli Gramdan Area (Chhaygaon R.C)	–	Government	0.5 bigha	
	Mollartari, Kandalpara and Panikhaiti	N/A	- do -	–	Not Known	N/A	
2.	Sulikata	372	Barduar village, (Palashbari R.C)	–	Government	3.6 bigha	
3.	Karipara, Bartari, Lakhitari, Keotpara, Guimara, Bangsar, Kurarpar & Palashbari	300	Malaybari (Khetri R.C.)	1950 & 1955–60	Government	10 bigha (1954) 8 bigha (after 1954)	
4.	Baniapara	N/A	Mairapur (Rani)	–	Government	N/A	
5.	Rangaduar & Baniapara	80	Sontali (Palashbari R.C)	–	Government	2 Katha	Rs 1,000
	Gumi & Dhumgara	45	- do -		Government	1.5 Katha	as grant
	Rangaduar	35	- do -		Self	N/A	
	Hohowapathar	N/A	- do -		Government	N/A	
6.	Bartari, Kandalpara & Futuri	400	Jiakur No. 2 (Bejartari Reserve)	N/A	Government	N/A	
7.	Lakhitari	N/A	Urput	N/A	N/A	N/A	
8.	Sulikata	22	Sulikata	N/A	Government	0.5 bigha	
9.	Sulikata	162	Sulikata Pathar	1967	Government	0.6 bigha	15 families again shifted
10.	Bejartari	19	Bejartari	N/A	Government	1 bigha	

11.	Balagaon I & II	80	Jamuguri Balagaon Reserve (New name Balagaon)	N/A	Government	N/A	All Hindu
12.	Balagaon I & II	N/A	Balagaon Markenda Reserve (New name Jharpara)	N/A	Government	N/A	All Muslims
13.	Duramari	50	Belortal (Chhaygaon)	1980	N/A	N/A	
14.	Jahirpur	5	Alukhunda	N/A	N/A	N/A	
	Biturtari	25	- do -	N/A	N/A	N/A	
15.	Hohowapathar	25	Nepalipara F. V.	N/A	Self	N/A	
16.	Biturtari	40	Belguri	1980	Government	Land Patta not allotted	
	Jahirpur	10	- do -	- do -	- do -		
	Bhogedia	10	- do -	- do -	- do -	- do -	
	Kandalpara	5	- do -	- do -	Self	N/A	
17.	Bherbheri	N/A	Kawaimari (New name Bherbheri)	N/A	Self	N/A	Muslims
18.	Char Area	500	Jhorsimli (Kochpara, Garaimari, Garaimari Pathar & Manjuri bill)	N/A	Government	N/A	
19.	Hohowapathar & Dhumgara	50	Ganakpara	N/A	Government	N/A	Hilly area
20.	Bherbheri	25	Choudhuri Khat	After 1960	Self	N/A	
	Bherbheri	8	- do -	After 1980	-do-	- do -	
	Alikash	8	- do -	After 1985	-do-	- do -	
21.	Futuri	15	Choudhury Khat Islampur	After 1985	Self		
	Jahirpur	3	- do -	- do -	- do -		
	Hohowapathar	9	- do -	- do -	- do -		

face of resistance of other villages of the area for whom the specific plot of land had a use as a grazing ground. Again, the government proposed to rehabilitate about 1,000 families on the reserve land of Jorsimli village who met the same fate due to stiff opposition from the other villages of the area. This matter is sub-judice now. Proposal for rehabilitation of 100 families from *char* areas at Saridal Rangadakuwa of Jharpara is under consideration. In Jambari, a proposal to rehabilitate 200 families is also under consideration. Proposal for allotment of half bigha of land to 250 families of the eroded villages, namely, Majartop and Borbhitha at Kharidol Nonkey village under Pub-Chamaria Mouza, is also under consideration.

Unfortunately even some of the new areas where the erosion victims were rehabilitated were eroded again. For example, families of Khalihamari rehabilitated at Makhiabill had to abandon their new habitation due to erosion caused by the mighty Brahmaputra. This would amply reflect the sad plight of the people affected by erosion. In the wake of the apathetic attitude of the state machinery, these people have become apparently desperate now. Through field survey, it could be gathered that families whose members are in service, could manage to set up their own habitations at places better than their native ones. But the marginal farmers and labourers had to be dependent on government largesse. From Table (7.4) on rehabilitation, we find that most of the places of rehabilitation are very remote. It is observed that some of the new places are lacking in pure drinking water, schools, health centres and markets. The newly rehabilitated people living in alien villages very often suffer from nostalgia. Therefore they always try to preserve and maintain their social customs; even naming their new habitats with the names of the old ones. For example, the affected people who had settled down at Malaybari reserve, renamed their new village after the original village to keep their identity. We found the names of villages under Malaybari area as Karipara, Lakhitari and so on. Land allotted to them after 1980 was insufficient. Bordoloi reveals in his findings that against the earlier figures of 75 per cent cultivators, only 8.3 per cent are engaged in cultivation, while 70 per cent of them are daily wage labourers or engaged in petty business.

The state of the thousands of erosion-affected people who have not been rehabilitated yet is beyond description. For years together they have to take shelter in the embankment under unhygienic conditions. Almost all of the affected people taking shelter in the embankment become forced daily labourers. Of course during winter, most of them grow rabi crops in the newly created *char* as the *char* land is very fertile and thus they earn their livelihood for at least six months. (Das 1991) As reported, there is a cooperative society meant for *char* occupants from Dakhala hill to Gumi and the members of this society are Hindus. On the other hand, it is reported that the Muslims of Simina are prevented from cultivation in the *char* land as they are resisted by the na-Asomiya Muslims (Muslims who have newly become Assamese after embracing the language—Editor) of the nearby *char*s. From the discussion with these affected people we come to know that all of them are deprived of the relief measures from government or other agencies. They become so frustrated with the modus operandi of the government regarding relief and rehabilitation measures that they have lost their faith in the state machinery.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

The government adopted some measures against erosion but these have proved to be ineffective so far. A huge sum of money spent by the state exchequer actually yielded negative results. As a first step the government started to construct embankments back in 1954–55 and it was completed by the year 1956. But due to shifting of the bankline and severe erosion, reconstruction of the embankment had to be carried out for six to seven times during the last four decades. However, the Palashbari-Gumi project (1986) on construction of seven land spurs between Futuri to Panikhaiti executed by the Brahmaputra Flood Control Department seems to be partially effective, though erosion is continuing between the spur nos. 1 and 2 and 6 and 7. Some of the action plans to be taken against erosion are mentioned as follows:

1. Construction of tie bund from Ch. 16,390 m to Ch. 18,315 m from Palashbari to Gumi of Brahmaputra dyke for 1988–89.
2. Construction of boulder apron and revetment from Ch. 18.85 km to 19.40 km of Brahmaputra dyke in Ambari area for 1989–90.
3. Strengthening of Kandulimari deflector by boulder apron and revetment for 1990–91.
4. Strengthening and recoupment of land spur No. 6 for 1990–91.
5. Providing boulder apron at the upper side of land spur No. 7 on the embayment zone for 1990–91.
6. Re-strengthening of bund/dyke from Palashbari to Gumi (Chimina retirement) from Ch. 5 km to 11 km for 1990–91.
7. Anti-erosion measures to protect bund/dyke from Palashbari to Gumi from Ch. 20,235 m to outfall of old Kulshi river (construction of boulder apron and revetment for 1990–91).
8. Anti-erosion measures to protect bund/dyke from Palashbari to Gumi from Ch. 19.95 km to Ch. 20.20 km for 1991–92.
9. Anti-erosion measures to protect bund/dyke from Palashbari to Gumi from Ch. 20.20 km to 20.50 km for 1991–92.
10. Anti-erosion measures to protect bund/dyke from Palashbari to Gumi at Panikhaiti area for 1997–98.
11. Anti-erosion measures to protect bund/dyke from Palashbari to Gumi (providing boulder apron with revetment on upper side of land spur no. 6 for 1998–99.
12. Anti-erosion measures to protect bund/dyke from Palashbari to Gumi (construction of deflector at Ch. 20,800 m including construction of check dam at Kulshimukh for 1999–2000.

It is observed that no major anti-erosion measures have been taken up by the government so far, excepting in 1985–86. It is worth mentioning that the anti-erosion measures require a huge fund and without the Central Government's assistance it is not at all possible to execute any major anti-erosion work for an economically weak state like Assam.

CONCLUSION

We have here made an attempt only to highlight the causes and effects of erosion that ultimately uprooted the people of the area of our sample. The cause and effect of the erosion show that there are no other alternatives but to change the present system of land use of the floodplains of the riverbanks (Kamrup Jila Krishak Sabha 1997). Findings in our discussion also show that, in the name of rehabilitation, affected peoples are either shifted to reserved forestland, hilly area or to swampy land, aggravating the ecological imbalance the state is already reeling under. Surprisingly, the state machinery including political parties is merely giving lip service to the politically sensitive issue of rehabilitation of the erosion-affected peoples rather than giving proper attention to either the quality of rehabilitation or the minimization of erosion. One cannot imagine the plight of the affected people (who are yet to be rehabilitated) and how they are struggling for survival. To avoid further loss from erosion, construction of concrete and permanent buildings must be stopped. Population in the vulnerable areas may be encouraged to construct houses using bamboo, wood and tin. From our above discussion we find that erosion-affected people get no proper attention from any agency and in most cases they attract lesser interest than the refugee. Further, the initiatives taken by both the state as well as centre on erosion seem to be treated as their routine work. The state machinery should instead give top priority for proper utilization of the newly created *char*s and all possible measures may be taken up to convert the *char*s into growth centres as the *char* lands are more favourable to all types of rabi crops. It may be mentioned that there is no loss of land in the process of erosion; rather land subjected to prolonged use and losing its productivity gets converted into new fertile land that is *char*. Hence, providing minimum infrastructure facilities like drinking water, market facilities, schools, health centres and arrangement for highland rehabilitation that is required for sheltering people during floods are an absolute necessity. The government may take up the short-term measure of introducing insurance programmes against erosion so that erosion-affected people can benefit economically in times of erosion. On the other hand, long-term

programmes of riverbank land management may also be undertaken. Some effective measure should be taken up to regulate the flow of the tributaries of the river Brahmaputra. It is the need of the hour to take proper anti-erosion measures to avoid further economic loss for a poor state like Assam. Of course it requires a general awareness of the problem and the voluntary organizations, political parties and above all the intellectuals can also not shirk their responsibilities in this regard.

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8

Erosion-induced Displacement in Nagaon, Morigaon, Barpeta, Dhubri and Goalpara Districts

JYOTIRMAY JANA

Erosion mainly caused by moving river waters very often propels men to move. For the last seven decades in Assam the moving waters of the mighty Brahmaputra are carrying away villages after villages and, after hiding them for some time in the bowels of the river, delivering them in the form of *char*s or river-islands. This is creating a huge pressure on the land economy of the state and resulting in an alarming rise in mass exodus from the riverine areas. In Assam, where the anti-foreigners' agitation (1979–85) continues to be a living memory,[1] the problem of internal displacement easily gets mixed up with the 'foreigners' issue'. The population displacement is problematic because almost the entire population of the erosion-affected victims belongs to a community that has been a potential fuel for creating xenophobia in Assam, particularly since the days of the Assam movement. The fear of 'foreigners' in the psyche of the indigenous people cannot be wished away as simply baseless.

A retrospective look at history will hold before us startling facts. The facts are startling because something exactly like the medieval Jewish ghettos came into being in the earlier part of the 20th century Assam at the behest of the British colonial rulers. The last decade of 19th century Assam saw a grievous fall in indigenous population

owing to *kala azar*, malaria and so on in their fiercest forms. In Nagaon (formerly known as Nowgong) alone, the decline of population in the decade 1891–1901 was 24.8 per cent (Guha 1977: 37). While Assam was losing population, Bengal was being over-burdened with it.[2] So, it was the policy of the colonial rulers to increase the population of Assam by bringing in hordes of land-hungry people from Bengal.[3] They were mainly settled in the riverine areas according to a new system of settlement known as the line system, which was first implemented in Nagaon in 1920. As these newcomers from East Bengal were exclusively confined to the riverine areas and any crop cultivated or any hut built outside it was liable to be burnt or demolished by the authorities, it is nothing but the picture of a medieval Jewish ghetto that comes up to our mind. The erosions of today are mostly the erosions of these ghettos and the victims of the erosions are mainly the ghetto-dwellers of East Bengal origin. They are widely known as immigrant Muslims, though they were never actually immigrants.[4]

A vast area of Nagaon district, for instance, facing erosion almost every year is 'a block of 8 *mouza*s...from Laokhoa (*Laokhowa*) in the east to Mayong in the west' where, as the *Report of the Line System Committee* reveals, many so-called immigrants were settled in the early years of colonization (Report of the Line System Committee Vol. 1, 1938: 10). A penetrating study of the report, aided by a thorough knowledge of the places mentioned in it, will acquaint us with the reality that some of the areas where these newcomers were settled were extremely low-lying and flood-prone and, therefore, unattractive to and discarded by the indigenous people. Today, with the erosion of these places or ghettos taking place, the victims are facing a volley of problems, some of which will be discussed in this paper.

Though the erosion of ghettos causes displacement and complicates the lives of its victims, neither do the ghettos totally disappear nor does ghetto-life in general change for anything better. After the passing of several years (for example 10 to 25), an eroded ghetto appears like a barren sand-island, which far from becoming a better place to live in, proves to be a worse one.

Till the 1930s, the villages on either side of the Brahmaputra did not experience much erosion and naturally the newly arrived

peasantry from East Bengal did not offer any fierce resistance to the implementation of the line system. The idea of offering resistance to it was the concern of those who grew relatively well off from amongst these proletarian hordes. But as the Brahmaputra kept on widening progressively by swallowing more and more villages on either side, the situation became more critical, particularly for those who or whose ancestors had been settled there in the earlier part of the 20th century. As the Assamese felt threatened by this massive influx, the land question was tagged with the language question and it was the popular demand of the Assamese people that the Bengali-speaking peasantry from East Bengal must get assimilated into the Assamese race. Ratnakanta Barkakati, a famous Assamese poet, and some other persons of Nagaon submitted before the Line System committee 1938, in their capacity as *mouzadar*s:

> An immigrant may be allowed to settle anywhere he likes, free of all restrictions, only at a stage when he will be an Assamese out and out by adopting Assamese language and culture. (Report of the Line System Committee Vol. III: Non-officials: 16)

Throughout the latter part of the 1930s and the early part of the 1940s the riverine peasantry from East Bengal had been under two kinds of extreme pressure: one, from nature and the other, from the indigenous Assamese people. While nature in the form of erosion was claiming his land, the indigenous Assamese as an assimilationist was claiming his language. *The Political History of Assam* observes that throughout the latter part of the 1930s and the early part of the 1940s 'the bone of contention' between the Muslim League and the Congress was the line system (Bhuyan et al. 1980: 226) whose violation was considered a *sine qua non* for the very survival of the peasantry of East Bengal origin who were, in the main, getting displaced by the eroding waters of the Brahmaputra. There is no denying the fact that Sir Saadullah, himself a Muslim League leader, was interested in bringing in hordes of Muslim peasants from the erstwhile East Bengal for brightening the prospects of League politics in Assam. At the same time there is sufficient evidence to prove that he was directly or indirectly responsible for the destruction of lots of huts made by them in violation of the line system. Sometimes elephants

were used to demolish such houses and sometimes they were simply set on fire (Jana 1989: 48). In the 1930s, a vast riverine area of the then Barpeta sub-division was eroded and a considerable number of people of that area came to Kawoimari and settled there, apparently violating the line system. Evidence given by the victims and by a responsible government officer like the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) before the Line System Committee in 1938 reveal that the houses of many ill-fated erosion-affected victims at Kawoimari were rancorously torched on the simple ground that they were made in violation of the line system. And as violation of the line system was considered to be an indefensible offence, no time was given to the dwellers of the houses to remove their household articles before the dwellings were set on fire.

While these huts were being burnt almost unopposed in Barpeta, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani of Goalpara was launching a militant movement against the line system. In Goalpara district, the north bank of the river Jinjiram was demarcated as a lined area for the peasantry from East Bengal and it is particularly this area that frequently faced erosion. Naturally, the inhabitants of this area frequently suffered displacement and looked eagerly for a chunk of land on the south bank, which was higher than the north bank. But the line system was a potential hindrance that they found very difficult to bypass. The war cry of Bhasani and his followers at this time was: '*Jinjirimer oi beri bhangte habe, bhangte habe*' (Report of the Line System Committee 1938 Vol. I: 25, 30) meaning 'That bar of the Jinjiram has to be broken'. He gave an open call to the distressed peasants to go to Darrang also, and to occupy and cultivate the vast tracts of wasteland lying there, with the slogan: '*Chal chal Darrang chal, Patit jami dakhal kar; Khodar jami abad kar*' (Jana 1989: 49) meaning 'Let us go marching to Darrang, occupy the tracts of wasteland there, and, as they are God's land, we must cultivate it'. There is no dearth of historians depicting Bhasani as a dangerous communalist; but an objective study of the course of events of that time will strongly establish the fact that it is only he, who despite his deep involvement in the then Muslim League politics, took up seriously the cause of the displaced migrants from East Bengal. Though the Communist Party of India was against the line system, its

negligible presence in the then political scenario of Assam mobilized the erosion victims, who were mainly Muslims, behind the Muslim League, or more specifically behind Maulana Bhasani. The main defender of the line system was the Indian National Congress.

On July 18, 1941, the Muslim League Government with Sir Saadullah as the chief minister and Rohini Kumar Choudhury as the land revenue minister—both belonging to the indigenous Assamese community, took up for implementation a scheme known as the 'land development scheme'. *The Political History of Assam* explains the scheme as follows:

> It envisaged a scheme of opening particular areas for settlement only to the indigenous landless people and to the immigrants who came before 1938. In the scheme it was also proposed to accommodate flood and erosion-affected people and those who came illegally squatting in some lined villages and grazing reserves. (Jana 1398: 6)

It was in conformity with the provisions of this scheme that the Saadullah government started rehabilitating quite a number of Bengali-speaking Muslim peasants at Laogaon near Nagaon town. This was considered to be a menace to indigenous interest, and resistance to this move was actively offered by Kanak Chandra Sharma, one-time Congress leader and a Hindu Mahasabha activist of that time, by bringing the firebrand Hindu Mahasabha leader Veer Savarkar to Nagaon (Bhuyan et al.: 38–39). Though the resistance failed to yield the result Sharma had desired, the instruction given by Savarkar to the 'defenders' of indigenous interest is historically significant. Savarkar suggested that they should populate all such places with tribal people from the hills that were likely to be handed over to the Muslims from East Bengal by the Saadullah ministry (Kalita 1998: 52).

Throughout the 1940s the conflict between the Muslim League and the Congress in Assam centred mainly on the land question and the line system. This was a phenomenal decade for militant peasant movement all over India, but, significantly enough, the peasantry of East Bengal origin, who were mainly Muslims, was being subjected to eviction in Assam. While the tribals and the indigenous Assamese people, by and large, supported the line system, the Muslim and Bengali Hindu peasantry of the riverine areas strongly opposed it.

In the latter part of the 1940s, however, a very significant change started taking shape in the psyche of the Bengali-speaking Muslims of the Brahmaputra Valley. They became mentally prepared to identify themselves as Assamese so as to take advantage of settling at any place they liked. Maulana Bhasani, who had all along been a staunch supporter of Bengali for the Bengalis, irrespective of religion, advised his followers, before he left Assam in 1948, that they should no more struggle for Bengali (Bhuyan et al.: 268). The uncomfortable tagging of the land question with the language question, however, found a comfortable way-out during 1951–61 with the Muslims' acceptance of the Assamese as their language in the Brahmaputra Valley. Though their relationship with the indigenous Assamese grew better through this acceptance, there was no subsidence in the acuteness of their land problem. Erosion of the riverine areas seemed unpreventable in the years and decades that followed and despite the fact that the line system had already become ineffective in the 1940s itself, the displaced hordes hardly found any stable land to settle in and cultivate. Erosion in Assam, particularly in Morigaon district, is causing the displacement of tribals also, but owing to the absence of a 'common cause' perception, the displaced tribals and the Muslims very often cast spiteful glances at each other. The increasing tribal pressure on the Muslims for vacating the lands they once possessed and the Muslim resolve to keep biting into the lands they have tilled for generations are showing no signs of an easy solution to the problem in question. There has been, on the contrary, a fierce possibility of ethnic disturbances among the displaced themselves for occupying the same plots of land.

With the widening of the Brahmaputra as a result of erosion and the shrinkage of habitable and cultivable space in the state, erosion-induced displacement is opening up more and more spaces for ethnic conflict. Spaces for aggressive clashes between the migrants and the locals—all belonging to the same community—are also opening up and becoming more and more discernible. At Simaluguri (in Kachamari *mouja*) near Nagaon town, for example, about 25 displaced families from different eroded villages of Morigaon district on one hand and the old settlers of the place, who call themselves locals, on the other, have been engaged in a seemingly unending battle over the

same tracts of government land since the earlier part of the 1990s. Though both the locals and the migrants belong to the same Muslim community of East Bengal origin, none is willing to tolerate the other, because land is a need not only for the migrants but also for the locals. As venom and violence are increasing on both sides and lands are not, nobody knows how the battle that has begun at Simaluguri will come to an end. There has already been a lot of bloodshed and death, particularly that of a local named Abdul Latif, allegedly by the hands of some other locals. This happened because Latif, although a local, aligned himself with the migrants and he had to do that not for his own safety but for the safety of his land (which like the migrant land also illegally occupied government land) that incidentally fell within the migrants' illegally occupied territory at Simaluguri.

IMPACT ON ECONOMY

The erosion of a revenue village causes a huge loss of property as the people displaced by it go to safer places. They build huts or temporary refuges by occupying grazing reserves or vacant places beside railroads, embankments and highways. These people become the main sources of cheap labour. A newspaper report reveals that owing to the perpetual erosion of one revenue village after another in Moirabari and Laharighat revenue circles since 1965 and the subsequent displacement of their inhabitants, a wage-earner found it intensely difficult to earn even Rs 5 a day in November 1991. In town areas the daily wage was no less than Rs 30. What might appear more important under such a situation is not the meagreness of wage, but the non-availability of work. One who somehow managed to get work considered oneself lucky, because in that labour-abundant situation, the buyers were few with sellers being many. Relief, whether from the government or from any other source was almost non-existent (Jana 1398: 6).

Exodus of a large number of people to Nagaland has been a regular phenomenon in these areas for the last two decades. Some become rickshaw-pullers in Dimapur (in Nagaland), some cultivate the lands of the Nagas, some work as labourers under contractors

in Nagaland, and so on and so forth. Their experiences in Nagaland are not uniform, but varied. While a fortunate few grow relatively well heeled under favourable situations, the greater numbers have to work under situations which are extremely hard and hazardous. Those who work in construction sites under contractors are very often overworked and underpaid simply because they are helpless and left with no alternatives. If they are engaged as agricultural labourers by the farmers in Nagaland, it is a common experience that often after the completion of the work they are paid a much lesser wage than that promised at the time of their engagement (Jana 1991c: 3, 1991b: 1). Minors and women labourers experience more painful exploitation at their hands. This is not an isolated picture of the erosion-victims of Morigaon in Nagaland. Exploitation of helpless people is a common phenomenon in every land and Nagaland is no exception to it.

My visit to the eroded areas in Dhubri district held before me almost the same pitiable condition. Something particularly surprising that one will notice in Dhubri is that, apart from living in thatched huts on either side of the embankments, a sizeable section 'of the erosion-victims lives on the hills there' (Jana 1991d: 1). Rakshasinipahar, Kachutolapahar, Tilaparapahar, Sonamukhipahar, Dudhnathpahar and such other *pahar*s or hills have attracted thousands of displaced people from various eroded villages of Goalpara and Dhubri districts. Erosion-victims in large numbers go to Shillong, Tura, Langal, Guwahati, Agartala, Sibsagar, Jorhat and such other places to earn their livelihood as rickshaw-pullers or the *lawallah*s or as day labourers, or even as hawkers selling eggs, toys, cheap cosmetics, vegetables and such other commodities. The coal mines at Langal in Meghalaya and at Margherita in Assam are also attracting a section of job-seekers. Erosion, at times, proves so mighty a leveller that one can easily see the sons of a one-time *de facto* landlord like Omar Dewani taking refuge on the rocks and struggling to survive by gathering firewood from far-off forests and selling them in distant markets. Mr Dewani had about 500 *bigha*s of land at Majer-alga and Kharsemari (both in Dhubri) till 1973 when both the villages were eroded. Many erosion-victims of Dhubri and Goalpara travel as far as the Garo Hills (in Meghalaya) to gather firewood and earn a few

rupees by selling it. While the firewood, thus collected, continues to be cheap, its collection from certain areas, namely, Baguribari, Makrijhora, Mahamaya, Panbari, Gauripur, Alamgunj and Yamduar, has become extremely risky in recent times owing to a spurt in Bodo extremist activities. A section of the hungry hordes, who depend upon the reserved forests of these areas for the firewood they collect and sell, are losing their lives at the hands of these extremists. Newspapermen usually report such killings in a mechanical way. They do not care to highlight the fact that a sizeable section of the slaughtered lot happens to consist of woodcutters.

Pauperized peasants from far-flung riverine areas also appear in Nagaon adding to the number of unregistered rickshaws. More than one rickshaw with the same registration number can plentifully be found in Nagaon town. In an interview on April 20, 1989, Anwar Hussain, the then president of Nagaon Zilla Rickshaw Union, told me that there were about 7,000 rickshaws in Nagaon town of which roughly 2,450 were registered. A section of the pullers of the unregistered rickshaws consisted and continues to consist of the displaced peasants from the eroded riverine areas. In most of the cases they are absolutely inexperienced in the job of pulling rickshaws and pose a threat to the safety of their passengers. They are one of the main sources of the dishonest policemen's illegal income and the most pathetic victims of police harassment. Since many of them come directly from their ghettos, they fail to speak and understand Assamese properly, which gives rise to the suspicion that they might be 'foreigners'.

A (November 1999) victim of this kind of humiliating suspicion and unlawful police harassment is Sibar Ali, a genuine Indian citizen, having not only his own name but also the names of his parents and forefathers on the voters' list. After the erosion of Dimatala (Jaruarchar) in the district of Dhubri, this illiterate young man came to Guwahati where he started earning his livelihood as a day labourer and easily aroused the suspicion of the Bharalumukh police that he was a foreigner. Apart from his inability to speak Assamese fluently, he could not tell the interrogating policemen the name of his sub-divisional headquarters correctly. Not understanding what 'headquarters' meant gave the policemen the name of his village, that

is Dimatala. This ignorance on his part led to his instant arrest and deportation to Bangladesh from where he subsequently returned.

Though an eroded revenue village appears as a *char* or river-island there is no guarantee that the original inhabitants will get possession of their own plots of land. Manpower, money-power and muscle-power play their role in deciding the ownership of the plots. There are innumerable cases in which some powerful men of the riverine areas occupy the whole or part of a *char*, divide it into plots, fix a price for each of them and sell them among those who can afford to buy them. As it takes 10 to 12 years of time to survey a *char* and record the land on it, the powerful men of the riverine areas get abundant opportunity to do whatever they like with the land they forcibly occupy. Sometimes they sell the same plot of land to any number of customers with a view to earning more money. While the rich of the riverine areas fight among themselves for occupying as many *char*s as possible, the poor fight among themselves for occupying the same plots of land. In 1989, I saw the erosion-victims of Ranglaichapari and Barbil (both in Nagaon) fighting fiercely against each other over the same plots of land at *Barbil-char*. As it happens in such cases, both groups were strongly backed by two mafia leaders. All kinds of crime, including murder for land, are common in these places. If the situation favours, the genuine owner can have his plot of land from the occupant on payment of money. However, if he is financially weak and unable to buy it, three options lie open to him: (*i*) he can become a tenant on his own land and give a part of the produce to the occupant; (*ii*) he can serve as a corvee under him and earn money to pay him for the plot; and (*iii*) he can give up all hopes for getting back his land and make for some distant place. When the genuine owner of the land is compelled by circumstances to accept the third option, there remains no hindrance before the occupant to settle an *adhiar* or a tenant of his own choice on the land forcibly occupied, get it cultivated by him and take a share of the produce. These mafia leaders of the rural areas thus become *de facto* landlords of the *char*s. There are cases in which a single powerful man can amass thousands of *bigha*s of land in *char* areas (Jana 1989: 46) keeping the legal and democratic machinery absolutely inoperative. The displaced people

as individuals find it absolutely impossible to put up any effective fight against the musclemen employed by these de facto landlords. The presence of political parties claiming to champion the cause of the poor and exploited is scarcely felt in these regions of human civilization.

It is important to note that this landlordism in the riverine areas is not a recent phenomenon. Some evidences before the Line System Committee 1938 reveal the fact that it existed even in the earlier phase of migration from Bengal to Assam. Jadab Chandra Das, the then Secretary of Barpeta Bar Association, stated before the Line System Committee:

> In some cases it will be found that the *matbar*s and *dewani*s (the influentials) among the immigrants are at present in occupation of 1,000 *bigha*s per head on an average. They having occupied more than sufficient land here, have introduced hundreds of immigrants to come to this place with no other motive but to make them *adhiar*s and tenants and thus to establish *zamindari*. (Jana 1992b: 2)

While in Das's statement the focus was on this illegal *zamindari* or landlordism, in Kalpanarayan Mazumdar's statement the focus was on the exploitation and deprivation suffered by the poor peasants in the hands of these de facto landlords. Mazumdar stated before the Line System Committee: 'Influential immigrant *dewani*s and *matbar*s may also be stopped from establishing small *zamindari*s by scaring away the poor helpless immigrants in the village' (Report of the Line System Committee 1938 Vol. III, Non-Officials: 2).

Even if the displaced peasant is fortunate enough to get possession of his land without much difficulty (when village reappears as a *char*), he might be required to sweat and drudge for several years at a stretch to make the land cultivable. But when the land actually becomes cultivable, another erosion might occur to render him landless, jobless and shelter-less. I like to illustrate this with reference to the alternate appearance and disappearance of a number of villages in the southern part of Dhubri—Maynakandi and Baraikandi. It was during the 1940s that these villages fell victims to the voracity of the Brahmaputra for the first time. They remained in the bowels of the river for about a quarter of a century and, then, appeared as *char*s in the 1960s.

They magnetically drew those people back to them who had been waiting for their reappearance for more than two decades. After sweating and drudging immeasurably for several years, they made those *char*s habitable and cultivable. But as soon as they became habitable and cultivable in the 1980s they got eroded again as a result of which their inhabitants became landless, homeless and jobless as they had in the 1940s (Report of the Line System Committee Vol. III Officials: 13).

Annulment of *patta*s (legal tiles) is another hazard in the lives of these displaced persons. There are various reasons for which the *patta*s get annulled. First, after erosion, many inhabitants go away to different places and start their career as rickshaw-pullers, *thelawalah*s (handcart-pullers), hawkers, vegetable-vendors, unskilled labourers, and so on and thereby get into an economic system that is not directly agrarian. This detachment from their one-time plots of land for years at a stretch makes them either oblivious to or unconcerned about paying land-rents regularly. Second, sometimes the displaced people go to such distant places that they cannot keep contact with the revenue department where their land is registered and thus, fail to pay the rent regularly. Third, most of the displaced people cannot pay land-rents owing to acute poverty. Fourth, the government sometimes declares exemption of land-rent after the occurrence of a flood. The illiterate people of the ghettos do not try to know for which period the exemption has been declared or which category of peasants is likely to be benefited by it. This ignorance is also responsible for the non-payment of land-rents for several years by a section of displaced, erosion-victims. Fifth, the revenue department itself sometimes refuses to accept rent for the land that has no physical existence.

Riverine areas like Pahirtari, Berkakhali, Lengtipara and Mahajanpara (all in Goalpara district), and Bauskata, Damumara, Madarerchar, Manirchar, Rasmari and Berabhanga (all in Dhubri) had been regular revenue villages till the latter part of the 1960s. After their erosion, the inhabitants of those villages made for distant places or moved to some other *char*s in search of a livelihood. It is during the 1980s that these eroded villages started emerging as *char*s. Though most of the erstwhile inhabitants returned to their places soon after reappearance, they could not establish their right over the

lands because of the annulment of the *patta*s for non-repayment of rents. A regular *patta* is the fountainhead of a peasant's strength. He can get loan, take bails and exercise his franchise freely if the *patta* is regular. A holder of an annulled *patta* is as good as a pauper. We have come across quite a number of such paupers in Morigaon district who once had held hundreds of *bigha*s of land at one time by taking advantage of the loopholes of the land ceiling act of the state. Mahammad Ali of Sialmari Kacharigaon and Sohrab Ali of Saulmari Kacharigaon once owned about two hundred and four hundred *bigha*s of land, respectively, but with the complete erosion of these two revenue villages they have simply become paupers, incapable of paying rent against the land they once held.

As the holders of annulled *patta*s cannot get loans from the bank or from the government, they approach private moneylenders or *mahajan*s that include, among others, Marwaris, Kabulis (or Afghans) and relatively well-off schoolteachers of the locality. As these well-known *mahajan*s do not agree to give loans to all the *char* peasants who approach them for loans, a new kind of moneylenders from among the ranks of relatively affluent rural youth has appeared in the riverine areas. They form clubs like 'Seven Stars', 'Eleven Stars', and so on, which are, in effect, money-lending bodies comprising seven or eleven Shylocks of today. These 'stars' of the state demand heavy interest (10–15 per cent a month) against the amount they lend and go to the extent of confiscating the entire produce of the borrower who fails to repay the loan in time. A very well-known method of realizing loans in these riverine areas is to buy the produce of the borrower at a price fixed at the time the loan was given. As the landless peasant is always the weaker party, the price at which he is asked to sell his crops immediately after harvest is undoubtedly the lowest possible price. In 1989, I saw some skin and bone peasants of Saulmarichar near Bhuragaon town in Morigaon district selling ground nut for two rupees a kilogram to the 'stars' and the *mahajan*s immediately after harvest—although the same commodity was selling for 16 rupees a kilogram in Nagaon town at that time. A time naturally comes when the poor peasant feels compelled to accept the writing on the wall. He moves to some distant places in search of some alternative opportunity or for a hand-to-mouth existence.

With the erosion of regular revenue villages, the communications of those areas go haywire. Tributaries without names appear disconnecting one riverine village from another. If the inhabitants of an eroded village become fortunate enough to get some patches of land in a nearby *char* for temporary settlement and cultivation, they have to cross tributary after tributary to sell their commodities and buy the articles of their daily necessity. Communication even in the comparatively advanced riverine localities is not much better. The Guwahati-based daily, *Samay Prabaha*, in its various issues in 1991 and 1992 carried exhaustive reports on the impact of erosion-related communication disruption on the life of the agricultural people of Morigaon district. After the erosion of six bridges on Merigaon-Bhuragaon bus-road (covering a distance of only 20 km), the prices of agricultural commodities fell miserably in those places. A kilogram of green chilly that sold for 15 to 20 rupees a kilogram in Nagaon town was selling for 3 rupees a kilogram at Laharighat and Moirabari, whereas the prices of very common industrial products like clothes, salt, mustard oil and kerosene were much higher there than they were in Nagaon town (Jana 1989: 45–46).

Erosion of land by the river Brahmaputra begets a very unusual kind of displacement in which the displaced person possibly gets possession of his land after the resurfacing of his erstwhile village in the form of a *char*, but gets disconnected from the previous administrative unit or is kept connected with a unit that is remarkably inconvenient to him. In the first case, the victims are brought under a district in which they do not like to remain, whereas in the second kind of case, the victims demand a change in the district but they are kept tied to their old district against their will and convenience. In Nagaon district, for example, every revenue village that is eroded becomes a part of Sonitpur district after its reappearance as a *char*. As a result of this, parts of Udhantala and Langia have ceased to be parts of Nagaon and become parts of Sonitpur district simply because they are no longer revenue villages but *char*s. Though the inhabitants of these areas find it convenient to remain attached to Nagaon owing to proximity and other reasons, the government policy of attaching every eroded part of Nagaon to Sonitpur compels them to go to Tezpur, the district headquarters of Sonitpur, for

every administrative or judicial purpose. This requires crossing seven or eight tributaries and several river-islands, or by going via Nagaon, which causes a huge waste of time, money and energy. Similarly, every eroded village of Morigaon that reappears as a *char* becomes a part of Darrang district against the will and convenience of the people.

Change of district for every revenue village reappearing as a *char* is not, however, a uniform rule all over Assam. A number of villages in Barpeta, including, for example, Kajiarchar, Baghmarichar, Ujirerchar, Maukhowachar, Alupati, Chaysimana, Majerchar, Kapastali, Kadamtala and Bhatnapaiti, are all riverine lands facing floods and erosion every now and then. Some of them had been closer to the north bank of the Brahmaputra till the 1960s and 1970s, but partly owing to huge erosion and partly owing to a drastic change in the course of the river; they all are now markedly closer to the south bank. These places are far away from Barpeta and very close to Goalpara. A man belonging to one of the above-mentioned *char*s needs to spend Rs 70 for a return journey between his place and Barpeta whereas he needs Rs 8 for a to and fro journey between his place and Goalpara. His natural choice is, therefore, Goalpara and not Barpeta, but he is kept tied to Barpeta against his will and convenience.

The victims allege that the traditionally hostile attitude of the persons in political and administrative power to the riverine people of East Bengal origin is primarily responsible for this kind of double standard of the government. Whatever be the genuineness of this allegation, the fact remains that houses after houses in the above-mentioned villages in Barpeta remain in utter darkness at night, because the kerosene-dealers of these places refuse to bring kerosene (the only means of lighting in the area) on two substantial grounds: (*i*) they cannot return to their respective areas within a day, after taking delivery of kerosene at Barpeta; and (*ii*) they have to spend quite a lot of money on transportation and communication as a result of which it becomes impossible for them to sell kerosene at the government-approved rate. A senior citizen of Ujirerchar, for example, who has been a recipient of old-age pension, very often finds it absolutely uneconomical and troublesome to undertake a to and fro journey between his place and Barpeta by spending about Rs 100 to take a payment of Rs 75 as pension. A section of corrupt

people have, therefore, emerged in Barpeta, who do not hesitate to grab the old peoples' pension by producing false authorization letters before the office concerned.

Erosion claims land, houses, cattle and other private and public property comprising educational institutions, health centres, banks, administrative and commercial establishments and many other things that a township might contain. An outstanding 20th century loss in the Brahmaputra is South Salmara, which started growing as a town in the late 19th century. Over the years it grew enviably as a centre of administration, trade, commerce, culture and communication. The horticultural, mineral and forest products of the Garo Hills (now in Meghalaya) used to be despatched to Dhaka and Kolkata by waterways through South Salmara. The growth and prosperity of this town had been uniform and steady till the latter part of the 20th century. However, the appearance of a 72-km-long embankment from Kharmuja (now in Goalpara) to Sukhchar (now in Dhubri) in 1954 should have been the first question mark over the future of the town and all other localities which were growing with it. The embankment, which was meant to prevent erosion, became eroded itself and the retirements which were made hastily and unscientifically proved to be more submissive to the rapacity of the river. The harbour-type areas, namely Berkakhali, Fakirganj, South Salmara and Sukhchar fell like packs of cards, failing to resist this rapacity. It is important to note that there was a demand for making South Salmara a sub-divisional headquarter in view of its well-ordered, and almost unhindered, growth over the years and in 1983, there was a popular movement also to achieve this objective. The people who participated in the movement could not, however, foresee that this township with all its man-made structures (namely police station, school, college, health centre, post office, two mosques and two temples, a branch of the United Commercial Bank and government offices of the irrigation, E & D and agriculture departments) would be completely destroyed. The greater part of the 50,000 strong population of this one-time town is now completely nomadic, though there have appeared two make-believe Salmaras: one at Tumni on the west bank of the Jinjiram and another near Phulbari on the east bank of it. South Salmara

College has been shifted to the east bank where a higher secondary school also is to be set up after a long legal battle between the east and the west over the site of its establishment.

EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Though no loss of property, whether private or public, is insignificant, there are certain losses, which are undoubtedly weightier than the rest. The loss of a school building or of a health centre is a loss of this kind. Even if the erosion victims can return to their own place after several years of time there is absolutely no chance of their getting the medical service they used to get from the public health centre, because that 'own place' will not be a revenue village but a *char* of unstable nature where a public health centre is a distant dream. There is, again, hardly any possibility that there will be a school to which they can send their children. This is not the destiny of only those who can return to their 'own place' but also of those who hope to return.

Dhumkura was once an affluent village under Laharighat revenue circle in Morigaon district. There had been two Lower Primary (LP) schools and one Madhyamik Education (ME) school in the village till a few years back. The village started experiencing erosion in 1987 as a result of which these schools also disappeared one after another. Erosion, however, could not eliminate the necessity of education from the lives of its victims. The structures of the schools had to be shifted to Chutiagaon, the place to which the greater part of the erosion victims moved for temporary resettlement. A newspaper report dated January 11 1992, on the education of children at Chutiagaon reads as follows:

> There are two LP schools and one ME school at Chutiagaon; they were once situated at Dhumkura. After the submersion of Dhumkura in the Brahmaputra, these schools changed their locations three times and now they are on Chutiagaon embankment (where a sizeable number of the displaced people of Dhumkura are now living). The repeated change of location of the school-structures was necessitated by the erosions, which rampaged the village time and again. There are

> teachers in the schools and students also, but all on paper. Whoever goes to the place, will instantly understand that education is nothing but a cruel farce and a lavish luxury to those starving creatures. Children, who are expected to read and learn in the schools, go to the *char*s either to gather firewood or to cut grass....A fragmentary piece from a discarded garment is as good as the most gorgeous piece of royal attire to these children who can be seen here shivering in the tortuous cold of December and January. Famine and pestilence are raging and ravishing villages after villages. (Jana 1992: 3, 1991a: 2)

The physical existence of a number of schools in a riverine area is, thus, more ironical than genuine proofs of literacy in those areas. When erosion displaces both men and their schools, the schools naturally come moving after the men. In this process there have been three LP schools (namely Baladmari LP School, Bhalukmari LP School and Ghagmari LP School) and one MV school (namely Khalisamari MV School) in close proximity at Baladmari-chapori in Dhubri district, though the actual number of students in them is quite disappointing.

No other place can, probably, beat Salmara in Dhubri in respect of the number of schools. Though Salmara itself exists nowhere except in the bowels of the Brahmaputra, the places to which its population has shifted are now fancifully called Salmara. There are, as we have already mentioned, two make-believe Salmaras: one on the west bank and the other on the east. After a huge exodus of people from the original Salmara, eroded several years back, the present population of the make-believe Salmaras is roughly 12,000. Though most of the people of these two Salmaras find it extremely difficult to keep body and soul together and cannot think of sending their children to schools, they can at least boast of the number of schools which have come moving to the place from different eroded villages. There are more than a dozen LP and ME schools at that place, namely Bauskata LP School, Bauskata ME School, Chaitarchar LP School, Sebaltari LP School, Balapara LP School, Damumara LP School, Sarkarergram LP School, Baladoba LP School, Dakshin Salmara Balika Vidyalaya (LP School), Dakshin Salmara Bazar LP School, Dakshin Salmara JB LP School, Manirchar LP School, Manirchar ME School, Baladoba Girls' ME

School and Sarkarergram ME Madrasa. In addition to these, two high schools are also there.

Drastically contrary to this, there are vast areas with large populations where the existence of a school is a remote dream. In 1992, I visited a comprehensive area of 14 *char*s in Nagaon and Sonitpur districts, which did not have even a single LP school receiving any kind of assistance from the government (Jana 1992a: 3). These *char*s were Abederchar (having a population of about 2,500 at that time), Baduli (1,000), Deepchar (500), Dubramari (5,000), Farsetapu (100), Kalachar (2,000), Kamalsutichar (5,000), Kochmara (2,000), Kuttamari (2,000), Laityamari (20,000), Moslemchar Moslemchapari/Moslemtapu (30,000), Ranitapu (5,000) and Sardar (2,500)—all contiguous to one another and having a total population of about 85,000 at that time. Since the government was least worried about the future of the children of these ghettos, it is the ghetto people themselves who set up four temporary structures (at Abederchar, Ranitapu, Moslemchar and Kamalsutichar) out of the meagre funds they could raise from among themselves. They called these structures schools despite the fact that neither the teachers nor the students had any genuine interest in them. The service of the teachers was unpaid, except in occasional good times, when they received an honorarium of two to three hundred rupees each. Most of the students came to the schools without books simply because they seldom got them either from the government or from their parents. The total population of the comprehensive territory of these 14 *char*s is learnt to have crossed 100,000 by the close of the millennium, but no improvement in respect of education has yet been witnessed.

Such pictures of paucity against plenty or of total absence against over-abundance are not however, found in large numbers. In normal cases the school of an eroded village moves to the place to which the greater part of its population goes. The teachers of such schools usually hesitate to disclose the actual number of boys and girls attending them, though in 1992 I found an exception in Abul Hasim, the lone teacher of Barbil-Mowamari LP School in Nagaon. He said that though there were two LP schools (namely Barbil-Mowamari LP School and Mowamari LP school) on the river embankment

upon which about 7,000 erosion-victims of three villages (namely Barbil, Mowamari and Kacharibori) lived, only 55 to 60 students attended the schools. The number of children between 5 and 10 years of age, living on the embankment, were, however, learnt to be no less than 700, but not even 10 per cent of them were in a position to receive elementary education. Most of these children had to help their parents in earning a livelihood by bringing thatch from the distant *char*s for sale (Jana 1992d: 2).

Apart from elementary education, another basic necessity supposed to be seriously attended to by a welfare state is health. The unstable *char*s to which the displaced people of the eroded villages usually move are bereft of hospitals or primary health centres/sub-centres. During my tour to Ujirerchar in Barpeta in 1989, I stopped after seeing the relic of a health sub-centre there. The sub-centre had neither any wall nor any thatch or roof; neither any patient nor any doctor had ever gone to it in ten years. But I was flabbergasted to know that there was a doctor for it and he, instead of ever coming to it, lived in a faraway town where life was comparatively comfortable. When I visited another erosion-devastated locality, namely Shuragaon in Morigaon district, the same year, I was told that the hospital in the riverine town had already been eroded and the erosion-victims who had been living on either side of the nearby embankment had no doctors but quacks and sorcerers to look after their health. After the erosion of their own village health centre, they could go to the Laharighat primary health centre but owing to the erosion of several bridges it was so disconnected that for all practical purposes it ceased to be easily accessible for these people. The few of these displaced people who had ever had a chance to go there for treatment came back with startling experiences, which they preferred to narrate to me in veiled and euphemistic words. Though I could not visit the hospital instantly, I had a chance to go there in 1992 and got an opportunity to narrate my own experiences in a Guwahati-based daily in the following manner:

> Poverty and illiteracy have joined hands with each other and prohibited the entrance of civilization, modernity and science into these distressed areas. Everything except medical treatment goes

> on unhindered at the nearby Laharighat Primary Health Centre. In the darkness of night there can be no safer place than this for the seduction of destitute women. In a place where all civilized forms of recreation are inaccessible and remote, it is erotic delight, whether fair or unfair, that is being considered to be the only source of recreation. (Jana 1992c: 2)

PLIGHT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Women and children are the worst sufferers in all disasters including erosion. When a child starves, it is the mother who has to give it food, whether edible or not. In the riverine areas of Morigaon, I have seen lots of displaced women digging out black arum roots or collecting stalks of wild plants, chopping them and subjecting them to oil-less boiling and serving them as food to the children (Jana 1992f: 3, 1992g: 1). When the ingredients of this kind of food become unprocurable or the children refuse to eat this 'food', many women are forced to sell their bodies for buying the things their starving children might like to eat. Prostitution is rampant in the areas where the displaced erosion-victims settle, temporarily or permanently. Sale of women is also not rare in these places. A newspaper report reveals that Sadir Ali, an erosion-victim living temporarily at Barbari near Laharighat in Morigaon district, sold his three young daughters, Jania, Kulsan and Fariza at Dimapur to become prostitutes there and, thereby, ensuring his and their survival. Another newspaper report reveals that a displaced peasant of Barchapari near Dhing sold his wife into prostitution at Dimapur in Nagaland for a paltry sum of Rs 1,800. The fact that a considerable number of women of these areas go to Nagaland, Bhutan and Meghalaya to become prostitutes is an open secret in these localities. Those who are unwilling to become prostitutes take to begging initially; but many of them, gradually realizing that prostitution is more gainful than begging, become prostitutes.

It is not the starving child alone for whom the mother becomes a prostitute. The mother has her own hunger also and she may opt for prostitution for her own survival. Here is an excerpt from a newspaper report that holds before us a fragment of this harsh reality:

> There are ample cases of women deserting their husbands, if they get minimum assurance for food and clothing from any person. Plurality in marriage and divorce, sexual adultery, over-procreation and such other things have got inseparably mixed up with the lives of these hungry, bare and illiterate people...

Abdus Salam (45) of Tengaguri says that his wife Rehana (32) had been badgering him for quite some time for going to Nagaland in search of livelihood. But as he declined, she eloped with a young man simply for food and clothing. 'God alone knows how the five children Rehana has left will survive,' says Salam with a whine.

Abdur Rahman, who was an inhabitant of Dhumkura, (now eroded) has been in an extremely knotty situation for quite sometime now. After the submersion of Dhumkura in the Brahmaputra, Rahim, along with the members of his family experienced a great difficulty. Unable to bear poverty and starvation, it is his fourteen-year-old daughter Jamila who first disappeared. People of this area who go to Nagaland for livelihood informed Rahim that Jamila had taken to harlotry there. Hardly had this agony subsided that his wife, Fatema, disappeared, leaving her two children behind. She went away to Shillong with a young man who had already been down and out by the erosion of Bhuragaon. Finding it unavoidable that he should have a wife, he married Fajila, another young woman. But before two years could pass, Fatema, his erstwhile wife, returned from Shillong and started living with him. The 39-year-old Rahim is now engaged in a deadly struggle to keep himself afloat on the perilous sea of life. Being burdened with two wives, old parents and four children, he is likely to be mistaken for an old man of 55 (Jana 1992c: 16–17, 1992g: 19).

Sale of women in the eroded areas of Goalpara and Dhubri districts sometimes takes a slightly different pattern. Between the sale of a woman and her subsequent prostitution, there takes place a marriage in which the buyer himself or some other person of his gang becomes the bridegroom and the woman who is sold becomes the bride. Though the marriage is nothing but a farce, it is the only thing in the whole episode that is performed publicly. After the 'marriage', the 'bride' and the 'bridegroom' go together to some other state (in most cases to Bihar), where the 'bride', whether voluntarily or

not, starts her career as a prostitute. (This pattern of trafficking in women is growing in other parts of Assam as well.)

In Nagaon Town, about a 3-km-long government land on both sides of the erstwhile Silghat-Chaparmukh metre-gauge railway line has fallen under the occupancy of a huge population comprising the displaced people from the eroded areas (who, in fact, form the nucleus of the rabble), the rural unemployed with diverse intentions and all sorts of anti-social elements governing them. Though there is no dearth of people among them who try to better their life by joining the ranks of day-labourers, domestic servants, restaurant menials and small tradesmen, their honesty, morality and the sanctity of their sexual life is questionable as they inhabit a place where all kinds of notoriety, for example, illegal prostitution, dispatch of women to distant lands (like Nagaland, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) and peddling of illegal liquor, drugs and narcotics are known to be freely practised. The spoilage of children and youth in particular, under the rampancy of such extremely immoral activities in these areas, and also in the adjacent localities, is a massive loss for which no tears or sighs are enough.

POLITICAL INSUBORDINATION AND HARASSMENT

Displacement is a debilitating phenomenon in the life of the displaced and hence, they can easily be subjected to all sorts of insubordination and harassment: social, economic and political. Since almost the whole of the displaced population consists of peasantry, it is the river-islands that attract them first. For the last two decades or more, there has been an increasing tendency on the part of the government to declare the *char*s in Nagaon as forest areas, though many of them are nothing but sandbanks (Jana 1992c: 26). Kochmara Reserved Forest in Sonitpur district, which consists of about a dozen of *char*s, contains very little forest greenery and no wild animal and it is irrefutable that most of the *char*s the Reserved Forest comprises are metamorphosed revenue villages. Till the fourth decade of the 20th century a vast area comprising Barbil Kacharibori Colony, Langia and Nasuni—all in the district of Nagaon—were regular revenue villages.

Throughout the 1930s, Nasuni Bazar had been a centre of hectic political activities, primarily of the Muslim League and secondarily of the Congress and a place for large political meetings, especially of the former. In the earlier part of the next decade, erosion began in Nasuni and Barbil Kacharibori Colony and a time came when their submersion in the Brahmaputra was complete. It is believed that a very important part of the present Kochmara Reserved Forest, namely Kochmara itself (where there had been a forest office till 1999), is nothing but the erstwhile Nasuni and Barbil Kacharibori Colony in the form of *char*s. The whole of Kamalsutichar (that is the once-eroded and then re-emerged part of Kandulimari), Abederchar and Gorukhuti, and parts of Langia, Udhantala and Uttar Kaladuba (all belonging to Nagaon district as regular revenue villages till the 1960s and 1970s when they were eroded) have also become *char*s and, as *char*s, they have been included in Kochmara Reserved Forest in Sonitpur district. Of these, Uttar Kaladuba has been included in a proposed sanctuary, along with its neighbouring *char*, Farsetapu, which was previously in Darrang and now is in Sonitpur. An abode of mainly Nepali people, Farsetapu had been a regular revenue village with an LP School there, till 1962 when it experienced erosion for the first time. After its emergence as a *char* and the subsequent return of its previous inhabitants to it, it was first declared a part of the Kochmara Reserved Forest and then included in a proposed sanctuary. A sub-office of the Reserved Forest was set up in nearby Kochmara in 1978, where from the forest officers started ruling a vast territory of 215,500 ha of *char* land. A catastrophe, however, befell the office in 1999 when the whole of Kochmara and the greater part of Farsetapu were eroded by the Brahmaputra.

Though the office is now extinct, the forest exists at least on paper, and the poor peasants still exist there with horrible memories of all sorts of atrocities they suffered in the hands of a section of forest officials till 1999. The marginal and landless peasants and also a section of displaced people of Nagaon who comprise about 100,000 population of these *char*s had to satisfy the dishonest forest officials with everything they could give them free of cost: hens, eggs, milk, fish, and rice of the best quality, vegetables, pulse, curd and such other things of daily consumption. Their failure to satisfy these

officials led to the confiscation and subsequent sale of their ploughs, spades, scythes, and so on. In moments of arrogance, these officials demolished their huts and burnt their crops. Those who intend to earn livelihood by ferrying passengers cannot do it freely even now, because some hoodlums in nearby semi-urban localities make an unauthorized leasing-out of the possible *ghat*s or ferrying points (for example, Langia-*ghat* in Nagaon and Ranitapu-*ghat* in Sonitpur) for a certain period of time (usually a year) by auction and thereby, take a share of the boatman's earnings. Naturally, the fare the passenger has to pay escalates. The poor peasant who has to cross two, three or more tributaries in order to buy a kilogram of salt or sell a litre of milk at a nearby market is required to pay a total sum of five or six rupees as fare to the boatmen who, in their turn, have to pay a lion's share of their income to the mafia leader in the town. This mafia leader who is in league with the corrupt section of the forest officials and the river-police can easily get the boats seized if the boatmen do not pay the monthly instalments in time.

What may surprise one is that this illegal collection of money at the *ghat*s or ferrying points does not stop even in the dry season when boat-service stops and people cross the tributaries on foot. At Langia-*ghat*, every pedestrian who crosses the tributary once is required to pay one rupee. Interestingly enough, it is not the mafia alone that plays the role of a Mammon in the lives of the displaced. A legally formed civil body like Dhing Town Committee is doing exactly the same thing that the mafia does in the remote riverine areas like Langia and Ranitapu. There had been a wooden bridge on the tributary named Leteri at Barbil till 1987. But several erosions caused heavy damage to the bridge as a result of which boat-service became indispensable for crossing the tributary when it was full. This created a golden opportunity for Dhing Town Committee to lease out the bridge-approach part of Leteri as a ferrying point. Every individual, whether an adult or a minor, of some seven thousand erosion-victims who have been living on the embankment for over a decade is now required to pay Rs 2 each time s/he crosses the river by boat and Re 1 each time s/he crosses it on foot. It is important to note that many of these people pay land-revenue to the government even after the erosion of their lands, but no developmental work has

been done in their areas. Even a damaged bridge has been allowed to remain unrepaired for more than a decade so that the Mammons of today can plunder the last penny from the poor people's purse (Jana 1992d: 2).

This flagrant exploitation of the riverine people has a long history, which can be made clear from the Report of the Line System Committee 1938. Though most of the members of the Committee favoured continuance of the line system, they were unanimous on the point that developmental works were being utterly neglected in the riverine areas where the migrants from East Bengal were settled. Here is a relevant excerpt from the Report:

> We examined the Colonisation Officers of Nowgong (*Nagaon*) and Mangaldoi...and were struck with the discrepancy in the amount realised as premia for lands and the amount allotted for development of these areas by way of improvement of communication etc. Roughly, a sum of 400,000 has already been realized in these two areas concerned and only 40,000 rupees, mainly in the district of Nowgong (*Nagaon*), has been expended. The Committee is unanimous in recommending that a greater proportion of the sum realised as premia should be spent in the area for the benefit of the immigrants (read, migrants from East Bengal) than is now being spent (Jana 1992f: 3).

J. N. Chakravartty, who seems every inch a supporter of the line system, has expressed the following opinion in his thesis on migration from East Bengal: 'And the immigrants were not granted all the rights enjoyed by the Assamese peasants … And they were not given the status of an indigenous person'(Report of the Line System Committee 1938 Vol. I: 8).

Political leaders may not know history, but they are expected to know contemporary reality. Still most of them keep silent till the election-bell rings. Eviction notices are usually served on these peasants immediately before election. When the helpless *char-people* approach the political leaders, they are assured that the notices will become ineffective if they return them to power by collectively voting for them. Though most of the *char-people* cannot cast their votes in the *char*s themselves, some of them go to the voting centres contiguous to their erstwhile villages to cast their votes in favour

of the person or the party that guarantees them protection against eviction (Chakravartty p. 16).

In Nagaon, the political party that benefited most from such eviction notices is Congress (till the mid-1990s) and in Barpeta, the Socialist Party (till the 1960s). Village heads known as *dewani*s and *matbar*s get an opportunity to increase their social influence and earn money by serving as middlemen between the influential political leaders and the poor peasants facing eviction. In 1983, a well-organized group of Congressmen got thousands of forms printed, sold each of them for 15 to 25 rupees among the *char-peasant*s facing eviction and got them filled-in with the assurance that they would get them permanently settled in the lands they were holding. Nothing, however, was done for them and the gang earned lakhs of rupees through this kind of trickery.

Birendranath Chaudhury, ex-MLA from Goalpara, once expressed the view that the *char-people* never cast their votes on communal considerations. They vote for those who can guarantee them safety (Jana 1992d). During the 1960s, Sahadad Ali Jotdar of Socialist Party became a hero among the Muslims of East Bengali origin by bringing back a considerable number of deported people from the erstwhile East Pakistan. There are examples of *char-Muslim*s voting *en bloc* for Hindu candidates, even though there were Muslim candidates they could vote for. Dewan Jainal Abedin, three-time MLA from South Salmara in Dhubri, took me recently to a number of *char*s (like *Tinso-bighar-char*, *Tindubi* and *Ashi-Bighar-char*) bordering Bangladesh, where several thousand displaced people live in abysmal poverty. Perpetual erosion has made these places deficient in food grains. At daybreak, the poor people of these areas go to distant places to sell their labour and, at dusk, they return home with rice and other commodities, all bought with their hard-earned money. But there is no guarantee that the rice will reach their homes, since, on their way back, many of them are subjected to a thorough search by the Border Security Force (BSF) men who, sometimes, do not hesitate to seize the food-grains and dispose these people to Dhubri Police Station as smugglers. Though smuggling is a well-known profession in these border areas and some of the erosion-victims also

take to smuggling (mainly of rice, salt and kerosene) for survival, the real smugglers usually go scot-free, because they have secret contacts with the corrupt section of the BSF men. It is these BSF men who, in order to show that they are not negligent of their duty, seize the poor labourers' hard-earned rice, leaving the real smugglers unharmed.

These hardworking *char-people* can scarcely show any real interest in day-to-day politics, but they do demonstrate an extraordinarily high concern and apprehension, if and when their names do not appear in the voters' lists. They apprehend all kinds of harassment, including deportation, in case of non-inclusion of their names in the electoral rolls. Some political parties are, no doubt, directly or indirectly responsible for creating this apprehension among them. If the party in power expects an inhospitable or adverse response from the displaced people, the first thing it does is get as many of their names omitted from the voters' lists as possible with the help of such government employees as are trusted by it. This ugly motive of the party in power cannot be proved directly, but suspected strongly when, even after repeated requests and exhortations, a highly defective voters' list is not corrected. A voters' list of Bargaon *mouza* under Barsola Legislative Assembly constituency in Sonitpur district proved to be one of this kind in 1989. It contained the names of the voters of six riverine villages and islands, namely Siporia-chapari, Alubari-chapori, Teliapathar, Dhakaltapu, Batuli and Muslim-chapori. The displaced people of these areas complained that, apart from omitting the names of a large number of voters, the election-office employees included in the list a considerable number of names which were absolutely fake and absurd. This daredevil act of the employees went to the extent of mixing up fictitious Hindu names with the names of the voters of Muslim families. Moreover, many glaringly male names were shown as female ones and vice versa. For example, a family headed by Lekhat A (Ali?) was shown as having five voters, namely Abdul Hasen, Padma, Pabanchandra Risidas and Umakanta Das. Except Lekhat Ali, all other 'members' of the family were shown as female. Since such mistakes were not one but many (Jana 1992d) and the people wanted to have their own names on the voters' lists than to cast their votes in fake names, they contacted the election

office at Tezpur (in Sonitpur district) and some influential political leaders on several occasions for necessary correction but nothing was done. Election was held in the area on the basis of this highly defective voters' list.

FINDINGS OF A SAMPLE SURVEY

There is hardly any place for the displaced persons in the modern world. They are unwanted almost in every place, even to the people of their own class and occupation simply because their presence at the place they come to opens up scope for competition in the labour market that may lead to the lowering of wages of the working men and the increase of the employers' power of bargaining. Even then, there are certain areas where the displaced confront less hindrance or hostility. I euphemistically call such areas the 'displaced people's pull areas', though the truth is, it is not places that pull the displaced, it is the displaced themselves that fancy a pull and rush to the places.

Immediately after an erosion, the largest number of the displaced rush to the nearest embankments or any other kind of government land wherefrom they disperse in diverse directions. *Char*s are their first choice and as land in a known or accessible *char* is not readily found, one may need to wait for years at a stretch for a plot of land in an existing *char* or in a *char* that might emerge in future. This is the reason why the largest number of the erosion victims is always found on the embankments or at any other kind of government land that they consider capable of sheltering them till an alternative place is found.

In February and March 2001, a sample survey was conducted about the 'pull-areas' of the displaced people of Sialmari Kacharigaon under Laharighat revenue circle in Morigaon district with the help of Abdul Mazid Kabir, secretary of a new and hitherto unrecognized NGO named Brihattara Laharighat Ban O Khahaniya Pratirodh Krishak Mancha. Kabir himself had been an inhabitant of the village till its complete erosion in 1988 and the other members of the NGO who assisted him in fact-finding had also been inhabitants of

the place till its erosion. The survey was intensive and family-wise, though all the displaced families could not be contacted owing to their long absence from the places where the majority of people were found. We, therefore, had to depend upon the verbal accounts of all such persons who knew them and who narrated to us the details of their misfortunes and migrations. Since the gathered people had to disperse and the dispersed had to disperse further, the data we could collect gives only a rough idea about the types of places people gather at or migrate to in the wake of erosion. Another word of precaution that needs to be mentioned is that some of the figures recorded by the surveyors are of the immediate past (2000–01), whereas some others relate to the not so immediate past. This happened in cases of those who could not be contacted and about whom the surveyors had to depend upon the narrators' versions. The data about some of the families are about five to 10 years old, because the narrators did not meet anyone of those families in five to 10 years, whereas the data about some others are very new, because those families could easily be contacted by the surveyors themselves. Despite the amalgamation of figures of immediate past with those of such past as is not so immediate, we consider the findings useful for those who are ready to tolerate maximum 10 per cent inaccuracy in order to get an almost 100 per cent perfect picture of the types of places the displaced migrate to.

The synopsis of the relevant portions of the findings is as follows:

1. Name of the eroded village: Sialmari Kacharigaon.
2. Revenue village to which it belonged: Laharighat.
3. Period of Erosion: 1986–88.
4. Number of families displaced: 282.
5. Number of people displaced: 2116[5].
6. The 'pull areas' of the displaced: The displaced settled at 4 types of areas detailed below.

TYPE A: Embankments/grazing reserves/low and marshy lands under government/hills/schools/hospitals, sericulture farms and such other public places and institutions:

1. Barthal-Daloigaon Higher Secondary School playground: 9 families, 88 members
2. Barbari grazing reserve: 4 families, 35 members
3. Chutiagaon Sericulture Farm: 86 families, 674 members
4. Rajagadhowa grazing reserve: 11 families, 87 members
5. Tinsukia grazing reserve: 1 family, 5 members
6. Oiramghat (hill area in Karbi-Anglong district): 3 families, 18 members
7. Garoimari (low and marshy land under government): 1 family, 5 members
8. Harangtali (do): 1 family, 7 members
9. Raumari (do): 53 families, 326 members
10. Kathani (village-roadside): 1 family, 8 members

    Total: 170 families, 1,253 members

    (Note: All the above places except Oiramghat are in Morigaon district. The places are rural. The displaced sometimes give the names of their erstwhile villages to the places they come to. Naturally some of the place-names given above and below are the names of the villages they belonged to till the erosion.)

TYPE B: *Char*s/*Chapari*s:

1. A new *chapari* without name, to the north of erstwhile Dhumkura: 5 families, 36 members.
2. Hamurchar: 5 families, 32 members
3. Mitmarichar: 3 families, 21 members
4. Lahariarchar: 2 families, 16 members
5. Naburchar: 10 families, 69 members
6. Sialthakurchar: 1 family, 9 members
7. Raumarichar: 1 family, 4 members
8. Madargurichar: 1 family, 5 members
9. Butmarichar: 2 families, 14 members
10. Moslemchapari (in Sonitpur district): 3 families, 23 members.

    (Note: All the above riverine places, except Moslemchapari, are in Darrang district.)

    Total: 33 families, 307 members

TYPE C: *Urban/industrial localities:*

1. Kharupetia (in Darrang district): 4 families, 31 members
2. Mangaldoi (do): 3 families, 21 members
3. Dimapur (in Nagaland): 14 families, 97 members
4. Nagaon Town: 5 families, 26 members
5. Tezpur Town: 1 family, 10 members
6. Jagiroad (in Morigaon district): 2 families, 12 members
7. Chaparmukh (do): 2 families, 15 members
8. Shillong: 1 family, 5 members
9. Tura (in Meghalaya): 1 family, 7 members
10. Morigaon Town: 4 families, 25 members
11. Lakhimpur Town: 1 family, 13 members
12. Lanka (in Nagaon district): 3 families, 19 members
13. Guwahati: 6 families, 21 members
14. Digboi (in Tinsukia district): 1 family, 6 members
    (Note: A large section of migrants to these localities live beside PWD roads and railroads, under flyovers and all other kinds of government lands.)
    Total: 48 families, 308 members

TYPE D: Rural townships/revenue villages:

1. Barkhabal (in Morigaon district): 2 families, 19 members
2. Moirabari (do): 7 families, 71 members
3. Chatiantali (do): 1 family, 9 members
4. Chenimari (do): 9 families, 69 members
5. Laharighat (do): 7 families, 51 members
6. Sagunbahi (do): 1 family, 5 members
7. Bowalguri (do): 2 families, 11 members
8. Dingarati (do): 2 families, 21 members
9. Dalgaon (in Darrang district): 1 family, 6 members
10. Orang (do): 1 family, 5 members
    Total: 31 families, 248 members

A family displaced by erosion settles at a place for sometime, but some of its members may have to migrate further due to the economic pressures their family can hardly bear. With the alarming escalation

of rural unemployment, a remarkable number of migrants migrate further and still further, leaving the other members of their families in the huts on the embankments, or on the grazing reserves, or at any other place that is most probably not their own. Such migrants join the ranks of day labourers or contract labourers, rickshaw-pullers or *thelawallahs* (handcart pullers), hawkers or vegetable sellers, or even the anti-socials. A very disturbing aspect of this phenomenon is the exodus of a considerable number of boys and girls to urban, semi-urban or industrial localities to become domestic servants, menials in hotels and restaurants, buyers and sellers of old newspapers and such other things, or even to become thieves and beggars. Some female migrants become prostitutes, though this is admitted very privately and in good faith.

Migration of the displaced from one urban or industrial locality to another is also a usual phenomenon, but we are not going to discuss it. We are going to discuss this second-time migration with reference to only one type of area, namely the TYPE A area, where the data-collecting team of the aforesaid NGO worked most intensively. The surveyors' report has revealed that out of the aforesaid 1,253 persons belonging to 170 families that had settled at TYPE A area, altogether 451 persons from 147 families migrated further, under extreme economic pressures, to the places mentioned below:

1. Chaparmukh (in Morigaon district): adult 15 (male 12, female 3); minor 5 (male 3, female 2).
2. Jagiroad: adult 5 (male 3, female 2); minor 3 (male 2, female1).
3. Daboka (in Nagaon district): adult 13 (male 10, female 3); minor 7 (male 5, female 2).
4. Hajai (do): adult 7 (male 5, female 2); minor 8 (male 3, female 5).
5. Juria (do): adult 9 (all male).
6. Jamunamukh (do): adult 10 (male 6, female 4); minor 8 (male 5, female 3)
7. Lumding (do): adult 16 (male14, female 2), minor 6 (male 4, female 2).
8. Kathiatali (do): adult 8 (male 6, female 2); minor 2. (both female).

9. Nilbagan (do): adult 13 (male 9, female 4).
10. Odali (do): adult 3 (all male).
11. Lanka (do): adult 15 (male 12, female 3): minor 3 (all male).
12. Rupahi (do): adult 8 (male 6, female 2); minor 7 (male 5, female 2).
13. Nagaon Town: adult 7 (male 5, female 2); minor 4 (male 3, female1).
14. Morigaon Town: adult 2 (both male),
15. Namrup (in Jorhat district): adult 8 (all male); minor 4 (all male).
16. Bongaigaon: adult 5 (male 4, female 1); minor 2 (both male).
17. Tezpur: adult 4 (all male).
18. Tinsukia: adult 9 (male 6, female 3); minor 2 (both male).
19. Digboi (in Tinsukia): adult 6 (all male); minor 3 (all male).
20. Silchar (in Cachar): adult 22 (male 16, female 6), minor 8 (male 6, female 2).
21. Jorhat: adult 2 (both male), minor 5 (male 3, female 2).
22. Sibsagar: adult 3 (all male) minor 1 (male).
23. Lakhimpur: adult 9 (male 5, female 4): minor 8 (male 5, female 3).
24. Dhekiajuli (in Lakhimpur district): adult 3 (male 2, female 1).
25. Diphu (in Karbi-Anglong district): adult 4 (male 2, female 2), minor 3 (male 1, female 2).
26. Guwahati: adult 16 (male 12, female 4): minor 12 (male 9, female 3).
27. Golaghat: adult 9 (male 7, female 2), minor 4 (male 1, female 3).
28. Kohima: adult 8 (male 3, female 5); minor 4 (male 1, female 3).
29. Dimapur (in Nagaland): adult 79 (male 38, female 41): minor 15 (male 4, female 11).
30. Shillong: adult 3 (male 2, female 1); minor 3 (male 1, female 2).

31. Tura (in Meghalaya): adult 3 (all male).
    Adult: 324 (Male 230, female 94). Minor: 127 (male 67, female 60). Male: 297.
    Female: 154.
    There are only two places to have attracted more females than males; they are Kohima and Dimapur where, people say, prostitution is quite free and easy for these people.

On the basis of this rough picture of migration from only one village in Morigaon district, one can only imagine the colossal nature of erosion-induced displacement and migration in the state. Let us take, for example, only three revenue circles in Morigaon district, namely Laharighat, Bhuragaon and Mayong from where altogether 97 villages have been eroded since 1965. Of these three, Bhuragaon is the worst loser, since out of its total 122 villages (as per 1966 settlement), it has hitherto lost 60 villages in the bowels of the Brahmaputra.[6] Bhuragaon's loss is followed by that of its neighbour, Laharighat, which out of its total 103 villages (as per the aforesaid settlement) has lost 30 villages (25 fully, five partly).[7] A common neighbour of Laharighat and Bhuragaon, Mayong—the supposed land of sorcery, magic and witchcraft—has so far been a lesser victim of the Brahmaputra's demonic voracity, but nobody knows how long its complacency will remain. Out of its total 172 villages, seven have already fallen prey to the river[8] and there are many others, which are going to follow suit. Though the government figures about the number of villages lost in the Brahmaputra are correct to a great extent, all other relevant data (for example those about the acreage of land eroded, the number of the people displaced and the places to which the displaced persons migrate) are either fake or unreliable. There cannot, however, be any official data more bogus and unreliable than those relating to relief and rehabilitation.

MEASURES

No malady can ever be cured unless the cause of the malady is eradicated. Erosion of revenue villages on either side of the Brahmaputra is the root cause of a large-scale displacement in Assam.

Much of the psychological fear of the indigenous people about the increasing numbers of Muslims in the state has its roots in erosion. Abdul Barek, Principal, South Salmara College, once told me:

> The appearance of new faces in the towns is caused not so much by infiltration as by erosion. As the riverine areas or *chars* are situated in extremely remote parts of the state to which the parochialists (sic) hardly go, they remain in the dark as to the extent of erosion in the state and naturally they consider every new face in the town to be the face of a foreigner. The inability of a section of such people to speak Assamese is the natural outcome of their long segregation from the indigenous Assamese. And this segregation has a long history.

On the other hand, the erosion-victims who have to accept further segregation by going away to the remotest *char*s of extremely unstable nature tend to interpret every case of negligence or harassment to be a deliberate conspiracy to wipe him out and exterminate his race.[9]

The government initiative to contain erosion has so far been most disappointing. Erosion cannot be stopped by making embankments or by laying heaps of boulders along riverbanks. Erosion can be stopped only through the dredging and deepening of the Brahmaputra's riverbed and, thus, preventing its expansion on both sides. This is the only long-term measure through which not only erosion, but also the increasing parochialism in the state can be prevented.

Nobody, perhaps, knows whether Bhasani could ever envisage dredging and deepening of an ever-expanding river like the Brahmaputra as a permanent measure against erosion, but older people of Dhubri and Goalpara strongly maintain that Bhasani did never favour the idea of constructing embankments as any effective measure against it. All the measures the government has so far taken are, however, of short-term nature. It exempts land-rent for a year or two, gives occasional relief mainly in the form of food, allots plots of land to a very microscopic section of the erosion-victims, makes embankments either with earth or with spurs and boastfully calls the latter a permanent protection. All these short-term measures to contain erosion and occasional reliefs to a negligible section of the erosion-victims have failed to yield the desired results in the districts in question. As to the futility of relief-measures, Birendranath Chaudhury once narrated to me a very painful experience he had

as an MLA from Goalpara. In 1979, there had been a flood in his constituency and he met Laksheswar Gohain, the then revenue minister of the state, for flood-relief to his constituency. Mr Gohain granted 200,000 of rupees in response to his request, but that could not be distributed among the victims. When the government officials were asked to prepare a list of possible beneficiaries, they could enlist only seven or eight names. Though there was a huge bulk of flood-victims, the government officials could not include their names simply because they were both displaced and landless, living either on embankments or in *char*s. As nobody without land was entitled to get government help for building houses, almost the entire money went back unutilized.

Another kind of relief we have already spoken of is the government allotment of land to a very small section of erosion-victims. After the submergence of Dhumkura in 1989, the then Ahom Gana Parishad (AGP) government assured that altogether 532 families under Dhumkura Gaon Panchayat would be rehabilitated with 3 *katha*s (0.0799 ha) of land to each family under the Central Government-sponsored MNP (Minimum Need Programme). But, as it happens in such cases, the greater part of the assurance remained unfulfilled. The State Data Centre (SDC) of Laharighat could allot land to only 130 families, out of a total of 532 families. But a considerable part of the distribution involved an utter mockery, since, out of the aforesaid 130 families, only 75 could take possession of the land and the rest could not, because the land allotted to them was under the occupancy of other people.[10]

The proper implementation of the MNP demands the distribution of such lands as are absolutely free from anybody's occupancy. But this basic principle of land distribution was grossly violated in this case. (The government principles of land distribution are violated in many other ways and some of them form part of our common knowledge.) Moreover, the objective of the MNP is to benefit all kinds of landless, including those rendered landless by erosion. Naturally, all the 75 families benefited in this case were not erosion-victims, only some of them were. According to Morigaon district administration, the total number of landless people in the district is 39,219 out of which only 5,934 families are landless due

to erosion (Morigaon: 1991: 3). Therefore, only a microscopic part of the erosion-victims is expected to be benefited by the MNP.

The State Government's rehabilitation measures exclusively for the erosion-victims of Morigaon have so far been a cash offer of only Rs 1,000 to each family. As per Morigaon district administration, the total number of families rendered homeless and landless by erosion in Bhuragaon revenue circle alone is 2,174, out of which only 203 families could be given the aforesaid assistance of Rs 1,000. The government that has been so incompetent in giving rehabilitation has proved to be even more incompetent in finding a solution for the problem.

As the government cannot solve the problem, people try to solve it themselves, in their unsystematic and haphazard ways. About two thousand erosion-victims of Dhing, Laharighat and Bhuragaon revenue circles—all in Morigaon district—have migrated to Kampur, Ujanmari and Bakali and occupied a vast tract of veterinary land (previously a grazing reserve) comprising 3,428 *bigha*s, 4 *katha*s and 7 *lecha*s (457.1 ha) and started cultivating it. Though these people have already demanded settlement there, the demand has not yet been met by the government and nobody knows what is in store for them. Kampur is a highly sensitive area from communal point of view and in 1983, when the anti-foreigners' movement was at its climax, Kampur witnessed an appalling bloodbath mainly on the question of land. None of the victims had, however, been proved a foreigner.

In another effort towards self-rehabilitation, about 2,500 erosion-victim families of Bhuragaon and Laharighat formed a cooperative society named Bakuni-Bhuragaon Gara-Khahania Krishak Samabai Samiti in 1991. Immediately after its formation, they earmarked vast tracts of forest land comprising 35,000 *bigha*s (4,665.5 ha) in Kaki and Lumding *mouza*s as their desired place for settlement and since then, they have never grown tired of submitting one memorandum after another to the district administration of Nagaon and other authorities demanding settlement there. Though the district administration has always been cautious in dealing with them, a letter of the Additional Deputy Commissioner to the Divisional Forest Officer, Hojai, on December 7 1991, makes the attitude of the district administration clear. The letter reads as follows:

> Of late, it has come to our notice that several groups of people are submitting petitions for settlement of land in Kaki and Lumding *mouza*s, including Forest Reserve lands. The problem of encroachment in those areas is already on the records and any further encroachment is likely to aggravate the situation in forestlands. As desired by Deputy Commissioner, I invite your sharp attention on the subject with a request to maintain a strict vigilance so that encroachment of forestland is strictly prevented.[11]

Erosion leads to encroachment and encroachment invites eviction or prepares ground for communal conflicts. The government, with the best of intentions, can rehabilitate only a very small section of the erosion-victims, though it can uproot the main cause of erosion if it sincerely wishes. In a democratic society the displaced persons deserve rehabilitation with land. Moreover, the public representatives often work under pressures of various personal and political obligations as a result of which even the most deserving section may sometimes fail to receive priority. This is what has happened in Jamuna-Maudanga Krishipam Nigam involving about 2,500 *bigha*s (333.25 ha) of land where, out of total 192 families from nine legislative assembly constituencies of Nagaon district, only 10 erosion-victim families have been rehabilitated. The rest comprise all other kinds of people including some family-members of some MLAs of the time.

Since the problem is gargantuan and neither relief and rehabilitation, nor ridges of earth or of stone are answers to it, the only solutions to the problem are:

1. Dredging and deepening of the river Brahmaputra.
2. Proper implementation of the land ceiling act and distribution of the excess land among the landless and marginal peasants.
3. Abstention from declaring the revenue villages reappearing as *char*s as forestlands. Instead the *char*s should be surveyed as soon as they emerge and possession of the plots of land given to the genuine owners. The mafia and the land-grabbing elements should be kept away from the *char*s till the time the metamorphosis of the revenue villages as *char*s is completely stopped by the dredging and deepening of the Brahmaputra.

GLOSSARY

Adhiyar (adhiar): a landless peasant who receives half (*adh*) of the produce of the land he cultivates.
Bigha: a measure of land equal to 14,400 sq. ft, approximately one-third of an acre.
Chapari: land formed by deposit of silt and sand on a riverbank.
Char: a river-island.
Dewani: a rich and leading man of a riverine area.
Ghat (in the present context): that part of a river from which a boat or a launch starts or at which it stops.
Katha: a measure of land equal to 2,880 sq. ft.
Kala-azar: Black fever.
LP school: Lower Primary school or a school where a student can read up to class IV.
Mahajan: a private money-lender.
Matbar: a leading and influential person of a village.
ME/MV school: a school where students from class V to class VII are taught.
Mouza: a fiscal division of a district under the charge of a revenue collecting officer.
Mouzadar: the revenue collecting officer of a *mouza*.
Patta: the title deed of a plot of land.
Thelawallah: propeller of a handbarrow.

NOTES

1. The six-year long agitation wanted the government to detect, disenfranchise and deport 'the foreigners' illegally settled in Assam.
2. A comparison between the population of the whole of Assam and that of a single district of the erstwhile East Bengal, namely Mymensingh, can help us in having a clear understanding of this point. In 1911, the density of population per sq. km of Mymensingh district was 280, whereas it was only 31 in Assam. The population of Mymensingh district had always been higher than that of Assam in pre-independence India, though the total land of Assam was 78,524 sq. km against Mymensingh district's total land of 16,475 sq. km. *See* J.N. Chakravartty. *The Impact of Migration on Demographic Trends in Nagaon District: A Socio-Economic Study 1901–1971*, p. 89.

3. The following note left by Sir Andrew Frazer, the then lieutenant governor of Assam on 7 February 1904, will throw light on the British interest in bringing in a large number people from the erstwhile East Bengal: '... that Bengal is very densely populated, that Eastern Bengal is the most densely populated portion, that it needs room for expansion and that it can expand towards the east. So, far from hindering national development, we are really giving it greater scope and enabling Bengal to absorb Assam' (quoted in Guha, p. 71).
4. The opinions expressed before the Line System Committee about the use of the label 'immigrants' on the people in question are interesting. K. R. Chaudhury, the then Superintendent of Police, Nagaon, for example said:

   The word 'immigrant' probably denotes a man who leaves his country to settle in another. Here the movement is from one province of British India to another. Some other terms, for example 'settler' may be used. (Report of the Line System Committee 1938 Vol. III, p. 2).

   Kalpanarayan Mazumdar, the then Sub-deputy Collector, Chaygaon, said: 'For the purpose of the line system the term may, however, be defined to include people from Bengal and Sylhet, mainly from which large number of immigrants come to the Asam Valley' (quoted in Ibid. p. 13).

   Abdul Kadir, a pleader of Nagaon court and a strong supporter of the line system, who belonged the 'indigenous' Assamese community, said: 'Whether the word "immigrant" is defined or not, we understand by it "a person coming from outside the Brahmaputra Valley and Hill District of Assam in search of lands to cultivate". I think the word may be defined in those terms if a definition of the word is at all necessary'. (Ibid, Non-officials, p. 23)

   The Line System Committee noted in the following manner, the view expressed by a government officer in an order he had given in 1934: 'The word "Immigrant" was defined in Mr Thomas' standing order in 1934 as including all persons coming from the districts in' Bengal and the Surma Valley, but not including tea-garden coolies and ex-coolies and this definition has remained substantially unchanged in Nowgong, now Nagaon, JJ till now'. (Ibid., Vol. I, p. 4)

   It is significant to note that though the Surma valley (which also included Sylhet) was a part of Assam at that time, anybody from that valley also was considered to be an 'immigrant' in the Brahmaputra valley. But so far as the dictionary meaning of the word is concerned, neither intra-provincial migration (for example from Sylhet or any other district of the Surma Valley to the Brahmaputra Valley) nor inter-provincial migration can be treated as immigration. Since the word 'immigrant' implicitly carries the sense of a 'foreigner' and the people in question were either inter-provincial or intra-provincial migrants, the use of the label 'immigrant' on these people was an anarchic act, to say the least. Some authoritative dictionaries have defined the word 'immigrate' as follows

   (*i*) *Immigrate:* come as a settler (to/into another country), not as a tourist or visitor–Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English.

(*ii*) *Immigrate:* come as permanent resident (into foreign country)—The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English.

(*iii*) *Immigrate:* to come into a country of which one is not a native for the purpose of permanent residence—Webster's Third New international Dictionary and Seven Language Dictionary (Vol. II).

According to Robert Miles and Nora Rathzel, the word *immigrant* 'usually identifies a person who enters, and becomes a permanent resident in, a nation-state other than that of his or her birth'.—B.S. Bolaria, B. Singh and Rosemary Von Elling Bolaria (eds). *International Labour Migrations*, p. 20.

5. Some more examples of mixing up of conspicuous Hindu names with the names of voters of Muslim families are given below from the voters' list in question:

House no.	*Voter's name*	*Father's/Mother's/ Husband's name*	*Sex*	*Age*
115	Sobhan Ali	Nazumudin	Male	50
	Dambaru Chapagag	-do-	-do-	18
117	Jalal Ali	Hasen	-do-	40
	Narmada Devi	Puspa	Female	31
125	Basar Ali	Tunu	Male	30
	Lilamaya	Dal	Female	32
	Jan Katwal	Late Man	Male	35
127	Mogul Hussain	Ahmud	-do-	60
	Khargeswari	Pahal	Female	40
128	Jalauddin	Asab	Male	32
	Krishnamaya	-do-	Female	60
129	Alauddin	Asib	Male	28
	Purna	-do-	-do-	25
	Ojalal	-do-	-do-	19
	Uday	-do-	-do-	18
133	Sabed Ali	Late Nabisthaja	-do-	65
	Mukujan	Sabed	Female	55
	Sher Bhujel	-do-	Male	20
	Lela	-do-	Female	21
	Hari Kharka	Late Bal	Male	37
146	Saor Ali	Late Zamal	-do-	26
	Tularam Pokhel	Ramchandra	Female	60
	Harmaya Devi	Tularam	-do-	34
	Ainul Haque	Atar	Male	28
150	Mahindra	-do-	-do-	29
	Krishna	-do-	-do-	22
	Rustam Ali	Late Sabed	-do-	60
244	Janak Bhattarai	Tikaram	Male	60
	Chandramaya	Janak	Female	58

(*Continued*)

(*Continued*)

House no.	*Voter's name*	*Father's/Mother's/ Husband's name*	*Sex*	*Age*
	Jamila Khatun	Usman	-do-	24
	Hazrat Ali	Rustam	Male	20
	Md Yusuf Ali	Jabed	-do-	60
401	Asena Khan	Yusuf	Female	50
	Abdul Hasan	-do-	Male	30
	Padma	-do-	Female	23
	Pabanchandra Risidas	Late Radha	-do-	23
	Umakanta Das	Paban	Female	20
	Gopal Das	-do-	Male	19
	Aniram	-do-	Female	68
	Fakhrul Islam	Yusak	Male	28

6. These two figures are neither entirely old nor absolutely new. They are the amalgamations of a lot of old figures with many new ones and, as such, one can confidently say that both the figures are understatements of the real position. The survey is, however, based on these figures.
7. The 60 eroded villages under Bhuragaon revenue circle are:
Bamunmara, Baralimaribil, Baruating, Barhalaukanda, Barukati, Barunguri, Barunguri: no. 2, Bihubari, Bihubaribil, Barkor, Barkor: no. 2, Barkorpathar: no.1, Bhuragaon, Pabhakati, Bhurgaon, Bhograthbil, Chechuguri, Chupabheti, Duarmaripathar, Duarbandi, Ejarguri, Gamalu, Ghansimalu: no.3, Haloukanda, Haibargaon, Haibarpathar, Jalaigaon: no. 1, Jhaubar: nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 (four villages), Jutiabori, Jorbil, Kharutali, Kathpari, Kacharigaon, Kherkata, Kherkatabori, Kherkatapathar, Chandamati, Kubertaki, Kupatimari, Kaporpowa, Kahitoli, Merbil, Merbilhabi, Merbil Colony, Mikiramari, Makariabhita, Ojagaon, Parikati, Pakariabil, Pithakhaiti, Sytirpar, Salmara, Singiapathar, Saulmara, Tengatali, Tulsibori, Talougaon.
8. The 30 eroded villages under Laharighat revenue circle are:
Kaurihagi, Kisamguri, Kashipori, Panikan,Tengaguri Nanke, Tengaguri: nos. l and 2 (two villages), Sialmari Kacharigaon, Dhumkura, Sialmari, Dhekeramari, Borigaon, Harangtali, Chutiagaon, Raumaribil, Rangrai: nos. 1, 2 and 3 (three villages), Chitalmaripathar, Madarguri, Chitalmari, Amtala, Garoimarigaon, Garoimaripathar, Leruamukh (all these twenty-five villages have been fully eroded); Bhajakhatigaon, Bhajakhaitipathar, Ulubari, Sonarigaon, Barthal-Daloigaon (all these five villages have been partly eroded).
9. The 7 eroded villages under Mayong revenue circle are:
Pakariguri, Sandokhaiti, Phaliamari (all these three villages have been fully eroded); Garubandha, Katahguri, Teteliguri and Kariguri (all these four villages have been partly eroded).
10. This feeling of mutual distrust between the so-called immigrants and the indigenous Assamese have, in fact, a long history and, hence this socio-psychological

phenomenon cannot be studied in isolation from the various opinions expressed by the then prominent persons of the state before the Line System Committee in the 1930s. Here we quote portions of some selected statements.

Haladhar Bhuyan and Mahichandra Bora, two eminent Congress leaders and freedom fighters of the time, strongly defended the line system, with a joint statement, a portion of which is as follows: 'Assam is for the Assamese. The land belongs to the children of the soil, and they are the natural guardians of it. The attempt to abolish the line system is nothing but a political move, the ulterior motive of which is to make the Assamese people a minority community and thus kill their language and culture at no distant date. We would request the Mohammedan members of the Committee to look at the question dispassionately and to see if the attitude and feelings of the Assamese people in this matter are not similar to those of the Arabs in Palestine. To our mind, we are in a worse case than the Arabs as our very language and culture themselves are in danger'.

Surendranarayan Pal, who also belonged to the Congress and participated in the freedom movement, opposed the line system, stating: 'It (*the line system*) is a stumbling block in the way of natural growth of nationalism. It creates a spirit of mutual distrust and ill-feeling'.

Mohammed Amiruddin, a prominent Muslim League leader of the pre-independence India, was almost in the same line with Pal. His view of the line system was as follows:

(*i*) It is an unnatural barrier thrown in the way of human advancement. Since its inception it has been creating a sense of remarkable aloofness, moral and economic degradation between the Assamese and the immigrants. The immigrants are kept away by that barrier at a distance from the Assamese so as to hinder the fostering of fellow-feeling, good will, support, sympathy, change and exchange of ideas, and to engender bitter feelings, mistrust, and social hatred between these two classes of people.

(*ii*) Our experiences evince that the Assamese stand for the Assamese, and the immigrants for the immigrants, without regard to right or wrong, rhyme or reason, truth or falsehood, in matters of the most frivolous nature and the unfortunate incidents that occur from time to time in the ordinary course of human evolution (Report of the Line System Committee 1938 Vol. III: Non-officials, pp. 15, 19–20, 24).

The line system is now dead, but the ills it had produced before it disappeared are yet alive.

11. The number of families rendered landless by erosion in Morigaon, as given by the government officials, seems to be much less than the actual number.

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9

Conflict and Displacement: A Case Study of the Election Violence in 1983

Makiko Kimura

INTRODUCTION

In February 1983, large-scale violence took place in many parts of Assam during the state legislative assembly election. At the time, it was reported that more than three thousand people were killed and tens of thousands were displaced because of the clashes, which took place between the groups deciding to boycott and cast their votes in the election.

The decision by the Central Government to hold the legislative assembly election in 1983 met severe opposition from almost all sections of the Assamese people. At that time, there was a large-scale movement going on which sought to detect and deport foreigners from Assam (Singh 1984: 1056–68). The movement was led by the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) as a reaction to the large-scale influx of immigrants from erstwhile East Pakistan and now Bangladesh. As one of the most important aims of the movement was to delete the foreigners' names from the electoral rolls, the movement leaders opposed the holding of any election without a revision of the electoral rolls. As a result, clashes occurred between supporters

and opponents of the AASU led movement and large-scale violence took place in many places in Assam. The most famous one being the Nellie incident in which 1,600 people were killed in a one-day attack.

Except for the violence which took place after partition in 1950, this type of large-scale rioting rarely took place in Assam. Although there were communal riots in the 1960s and the 1970s over language issues, the scale of violence was much smaller (Misra 2001). However, in 1983, the clashes involved thousands of people and included an anti-Muslim streak, which was rarely seen in Assam. Although the movement was against 'foreigners', as the majority of the people who cast their vote in the election were Muslims, the victims were mainly Muslim immigrants of Bengali origin.

The group clashes not only caused thousands of deaths and injuries, but also forced lakhs of people to flee and be displaced from their villages. It is reported that in Nowgong (subsequently changed to Nagaon) district, tens of thousands of people fled to refugee camps. Some of them even fled to the neighbouring states of West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh. Although most of the displaced people returned to their villages within six to 12 months of the event, it affected their lives tremendously. The group clashes took place mainly between the supporters of the election and its opponents. Although it is true that many of the victims were immigrant Bengali Muslims, if we take a close look at the numerous violent incidents, it is difficult to tell in general who were the victims and who were the attackers. One newspaper reported that 'Assam violence has no set pattern' (*Indian Express* 24 February 1983). Another stated: 'the victims did not belong to the same group everywhere. It was a chain in which the weaker faction suffered everywhere' (*Amrita Bazar Patrika* 23 February 1983).

In order to explain the cause of the violence mentioned above, many people have referred to land alienation of tribes at the hands of the immigrants, especially in the case of the Nellie incident. In the area, it was reported that the newly settled immigrant Muslims deprived the Tiwas (the tribe in the attacking group) of their land. A similar pattern can be seen in the Gohpur incident, where the Bodo tribes were evicted from the reserved forest which was later allocated to the Assamese. The factor of land alienation of tribes

is indeed very important when we analyze the election violence in 1983. Several scholars and journalists mention land alienation as the cause of the incident in that locality or neighbourhood (Gupta 1984; Baruah 1999; Hazarika 2000). However, although the examination of such local context is indeed important, it does not explain why the riot occurred in the particular period of the 1983 election. In order to understand this, we should look at the political situation, which allowed such violence to occur.

In the election violence of 1983, and particularly the Nellie incident, there was a local context as well as state-level and national-level politics. This paper looks at both levels in search of the cause for violence and adds a few observations for the analysis of the election violence. On the election violence and the Nellie incident, there is hardly any intensive analysis and many factors remain unexplained or under-explained, due to lack of some important official documents on the matter. As the source is limited, this paper aims at locating what has been and what has not been explained, based on the existing literatures and media reports as well as interviews with villagers and police officers and suggests issues to be investigated in the future.

CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

The 1983 Assembly Election and Group Clashes

In December 1982, the Central Government decided to hold a state legislative assembly election in Assam. Prior to this, there was a three-year long movement led by the AASU and the AAGSP. The movement leaders were very successful in mobilizing the masses and they managed to have several rounds of talks with the Congress (I) government at the centre headed by Indira Gandhi at the time. The Central Government conceded that most of the claims of the movement leaders were right, but they proposed to deport foreigners who entered Assam after 1971, even though the movement leaders demanded that 1951 be the cut-off year. The Central Government and the movement leaders failed to come to an agreement on this point and the movement leaders continued their activities by calling a bandh and organizing satyagrahas and oil blockades.

From December 1979 to December 1982, because of the movement, President's Rule was imposed in Assam a number of times and there were only two short-term Congress (I) governments. One was led by Anwara Taimur and lasted only for six months from December 1980, and another was led by Keshab Gogoi, which lasted only for two months (from January 1982). As President's Rule could be imposed for a maximum of one year according to the provisions of the Constitution of India, the Central Government decided to hold the state legislative assembly election in December 1982.

The AASU and the AAGSP leaders decided to boycott the election, unless the electoral rolls were revised. They called it Assam's 'last struggle for survival' and campaigned in every district in the Brahmaputra valley. Although the movement leaders conducted their activities in a 'peaceful way', in some parts there were incidents of burning of bridges and physical blockades of polling booths to prevent people from casting their votes. On the other hand, the immigrants, who saw the movement as targeted against them, saw the election as a good opportunity to elect an 'immigrant-friendly' government (Baruah 1999: 131). As a result, a large-scale confrontation occurred over the issue of whether or not to hold the election in Assam. On this point, Sanjib Baruah comments as follows:

> Thus the question was not who would win, but whether there would be an election at all. It was the holding of the election that became the focus of a contest between the Assam movement and the Indian State. An election with a moderate to high turnout would have weakened the claims of the movement about its representativeness and its power capability. (Baruah 1999: 131)

A series of group clashes occurred just before and after the election. On 13 February 1983, there was a clash between the Bodos, the plains tribe in Assam, and the Assamese in Gohpur, Darrang district. In this area, the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), an organization demanding an autonomous state for plains tribes in Assam, decided to contest the election and the Bodos supported it. As a result, there was a clash between the Bodo election supporters and the AASU and AAGSP workers who tried to block access to the polling booth by burning bridges, etc. The incident is known as Gohpur incident and was reported widely by the pan-Indian media.

Almost at the same time, a series of attacks and counter-attacks between the immigrant Muslims and the Assamese people in *char* areas (flood-prone areas and river islands) in the Brahmaputra river, south of Mangaldoi, started. It is estimated that more than a hundred people died in the group clashes in this area. The incident was later known as the Mangaldoi incident (Gupta 1984: 15–6).

On 18 February 1983, a large-scale attack took place against immigrant Muslims by the Assamese and the Tiwa tribes near a village called Nellie in Nowgong district. Ten Muslim villages surrounded by Assamese and Tiwa villages became the target of the attack. In this area, 1,600 people died in a one-day attack. This is referred to as the Nellie massacre, which is known as the incident with the largest number of victims and has been reported widely by the pan-Indian and international media.

These are a few major incidents that took place during the election period and were reported widely in newspapers. But there were numerous other violent incidents that occurred in every district in the Brahmaputra valley. It is said that most of the victims were Muslims of Bengali origin. However the attackers were not always Assamese or tribals and the victims were not always Bengali Muslims. Throughout Assam, there were clashes involving most of the communities in Assam—the Assamese, tribes, Bengali Muslims and Hindus. In some cases, Assamese and the Mishings, another plains tribe, attacked Bengali Muslims and Bengali Hindus. In another case, Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims attacked Assamese villages. It is reported that no particular pattern could be determined for the group clashes that took place in Assam during this period (Gupta 1984: 16).

Conflict and Displacement

When group clashes took place, many people fled from their villages and sought shelter in the refugee camps in and outside Assam. It is difficult to determine the exact number of people who were displaced by the clashes, as there are no official records. From the newspaper reports at the time, we can roughly estimate the number and gain some knowledge about the situation of the displaced people at the time.

One report in *The Times of India* stated that more than 65,000 people were displaced and took shelter in the refugee camps:

> Thousands of people continue to flee their homes and villages in the wake of persistent armed attacks on them and the fear of being hacked to death. During a 300-km tour of Nowgong district this correspondent saw scores of families of refugees trekking to shelter and safety with their few belongings and their young children in arms. The number of such refugees, say district officials, already exceeds 65,000 on last count, later yesterday. (*The Times of India* 28 February 1983)

It reported that the refugees were distributed to 53 camps in the district, and most of them were Muslims from erstwhile East Bengal/ Pakistan who had migrated to Assam in the 1940s. For example, in the Nellie refugee camp, which was set up near the site of the Nellie incident, 3,500 people were sheltered, whereas 15,000 were in the Dabaka camp, 9,000 in the Jamunamukh camp and 5,400 in the Kampur camp. Many of them refused to go back to their homes at the time of the report, one week to ten days after the incident, since the situation was still tense. Thus, in Nowgong alone, there were at least 23,000 displaced people. Nowgong was one of the worst damaged districts during the election violence, but there were other districts such as Darrang, Kamrup and North Lakimpur which were as badly damaged as Nowgong.

Moreover, there were some refugees who fled to the neighbouring states of West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh during the violence. The newspapers published from Kolkata, *The Statesman* and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, reported on the situation. On 23 February 1983, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* reported that 6,000 people arrived at Alipurduar railway station from Assam. On the 24 February, under the headline of 'Mass Influx of Refugees', it was reported that:

> West Bengal is threatened with a mass exodus of refugees from Assam. Many of the families, uprooted by the present disturbances there are on their way to West Bengal, waiting at different railway station. … Till today about 5,000 have taken shelter at the Alipurduar station and at different camps. (*Amrita Bazar Patrika* 24 February 1983)

The Statesman also reported on the influx of 'refugees' from Assam. On 26 February 1983, it reported that as many as 5,000 people had taken shelter in camps. According to the report, most of the refugees were Bengali Hindus, including some Bengali Muslims and Bihari Hindus. It stated that the largest number of evacuees came from Darrang, a district where the Gohpur and Mangaldoi incident occurred. There were refugees from Kamrup and Goalpara also. The majority of the refugees came by the Arunachal Express, which runs across the north bank of the Brahmaputra. The same report stated that about 11,000 refugees from Assam had taken shelter in Arunachal Pradesh, which shares a border with Assam on the northern side.

The number shown above only included those who were sheltered in the refugee camps. It can be estimated that at least 100,000 people were displaced during the election violence which took place in February 1983. The population of Assam at the time was estimated to be 1.9 million, thus more than one-twentieth of the whole state population were displaced. This surprising number shows that the situation in Assam during the election period was so tense that a large number of people felt insecure about their lives and properties.

At the time of the violence in the 1983 election, the displacement caused by the group clashes was temporary. Usually, people went back to their villages and settled down again. Even in the case of the Nellie incident, most people went back to their villages and normalcy was attained within six to twelve months. Nonetheless, it affected people's lives tremendously. For example, in case of children who were adopted by the SOS Childrens's Village[1] in Hajoi, many of them suffered psychological damage as an after effect of the incidents.

LOCAL CONTEXT OF THE MASSACRE: INQUIRY INTO THE NELLIE INCIDENT

As mentioned earlier, in the analysis of the cause for the killing, many scholars argued that the land alienation was the primary cause for the attack. Regarding the Nellie incident in which the largest number of people were killed during the election violence, the most well circulated explanation in the writings of the academics and

journalists is the land alienation of the plains tribes at the hands of the Muslim immigrants. It has been said that tribes in Assam have lost their land because of the continual Muslim influx. And when scholars and journalists try to analyze the cause of the massacre, they have often suggested that a sense of land alienation ran deep among the Tiwas, the group which consisted the majority in the attacking group (Baruah 1999: 134; Hazarika 2000: 46).

Not only the Assamese scholars and journalists but also the journalists from the pan-Indian media suggested that the land alienation was the root cause of the attack. Shekhar Gupta, a correspondent for the *Indian Express* at the time and who wrote one of the best reports on the Nellie incident, stated:

> In the great immigrant scramble for land, the Lalungs [old name for the Tiwas] were the worst sufferers. The tribe (current population about 85,000) lost most of its good land and was pushed deeper towards the various tributaries of the Brahmaputra, particularly the Kopilli, and into the jungles along the Mikir hills. … It is possible that certain elements successfully exploited Lalung ire, but basically the outburst originated from suspicion and hatred which had built up over the years, against people who had usurped their land. (Gupta 1984: 8)

The issue of land alienation suffered by the tribes is certainly one of the important factors when analyzing the Nellie incident. However, the Tiwas and the Muslims immigrants, who are supposed to have been the attackers and the victims in the incident, do not refer to it when they are asked about the cause of the incident. In 2001 and 2002, when I conducted research on the cause of the Nellie incident, almost no Tiwa or Muslim peasants who were involved in the incident referred to the issue as dispute over land. Instead, they stated that the election and the AASU movement were the cause of the incident. For example, one respondent in a Muslim village stated:

> The election was to be held. And the people of Assam under the banner of AASU decided. They decided not to get involved in the election process. So they asked all [of] us people not to vote. They threatened. But some 15, 16 people went to Alichinga polling centre. They went there for voting but they found nobody there, no polling officers, no election authority people. And they got back.[2]

In case of the Tiwas, there are several versions cited as the cause of the attack. Some referred to their involvement with the movement and stressed that they just helped the AASU. A villager said:

> The main issue was that particular movement. We only knew that anti-foreigners' movement is going on and led by the AASU. We felt one crisis [of foreigners' influx] is going on with the Assamese people, so we united and we put up a stand.[3]

Others stressed the harassments caused by the Muslims, such as kidnapping of tribal girls by them. Moreover, some people suggested that there were rumours that some strangers came from the Muslim villages and they tried to attack the local people.

> Prior to the Nellie incident, there was an incident in Garjan [a village situated in the northern part of Nellie]. From that village, a few Muslim people came to Muladhari [one of the main targeted villages in the attack] and settled there. They started to harass our people in neighbouring villages. We came to know about it and then feared that they might attack us. On 13th and 14th of February, several village leaders assembled and discussed the matter, and decided to attack the village.[4]

It should be noted that although both the villagers and the intellectuals talk about the cause of the same incident, the dimensions of their narratives are different. The villagers in the Nellie area, both victims and attackers, mention as the direct cause of the incident the election and casting of votes, involvement of AASU leadership, harassments by Muslims and suspected attacks by them (Kimura 2003: 225–39). On the other hand, the analyses by intellectuals mentioned earlier referred to the structural (or economic) cause of a historical problem of land alienation among the local people. They argue that the immigration itself is a fundamental problem and suggest that the cause of the problem lies in the social structure. Unlike the Tiwas and the Muslims, they make no reference to the direct causes.

Though it is certainly important to analyze the economic dimensions of the riots, it is also problematic to over-emphasize this factor. It actually conceals other factors such as direct causes of the violence

which are mentioned by the villagers. In a paper on the communal riot which took place in Bhagalpur in 1989, Gyanendra Pandey observes: 'Too often, however, the statement of complex, long-term historical processes leaves little room for human agency and human responsibility' (Pandey 1992: 39). Moreover, the factor of land alienation cannot explain why the violence took place at this point of time. In other words, people in the locality lived side by side for more than 50 years. Then why suddenly in 1983 did the killing take place? In order to answer this query, we should take a look at the kind of political failure that led to such a large-scale violence.

POLITICAL PARTIES, STUDENT LEADERS AND POLICE

In cases of large-scale riots in India, it is very common that political parties, large-scale organizations and sometimes police play an important role in the conflagration of the riot. In case of the election violence in Assam in 1983, however, although several people accuse the involvement of the student organizations or the communal agencies, it is more of a political failure of the Congress and the AASU rather than the manipulation by them. Let us now summarize the information that we receive from the media reports and other secondary materials.

The major student leaders of the AASU were arrested at the time of the election. On 7 January 1983, when they returned from the tripartite talks with the Central Government in New Delhi, Prafulla Mahanta and Bhrigu Kumar Mahanta, the president and the general secretary of AASU, respectively were detained under the National Security Act. They were detained until the election was finished and it was only after the High Court ordered their release on 22 February 1983, that they were set free. Immediately after the release, they issued a statement reiterating their call for peace and harmony in Assam. Even when they were detained during the election period, the acting leaders of the AASU called for peace and harmony repeatedly when the violence under review erupted (*The Assam Tribune* February 1983).

During their detention, local student leaders were still active and they tried hard to keep people from going to cast their votes. In some cases, they burned down the bridges and tried to block the polling stations forcefully. However, the role of the local student leaders in igniting and spreading violence varies from one area to another. In case of the Nellie incident, the Tiwas stated that the AASU leaders were involved while the AASU and AAGSP leaders in the nearby town of Morigaon denied it. Thus, the role of the AASU in the election violence is still ambiguous to some extent. It can be pointed out, however, that by organizing a boycott, which led to the tense situation, their role in creating the violent atmosphere cannot be neglected.

On the other hand, the role of the Central Government was apparently clear on this point. The government was keen on implementing the election and did not pay much attention to the warnings given by different sections of people, including the local police. Arun Shourie, the editor-in-chief of *Indian Express* at that time, who later joined the Bharatiya Janata Party, revealed in his long report published in *India Today* that there was an intelligence warning about potentially violent ethnic conflicts in areas around Nellie. It had been ignored and neglected by the government in order to deploy security personnel in the polling stations (Shourie 1983: 66; Baruah 1999: 133).

However, once violence broke out, it went out of control of the district administration, police, security forces and the movement leaders too. In an interview with the author, an IPS officer described it as ‘a very special situation in which everybody became violent towards everybody else’. He commented: ‘police personnel can arrest one criminal in a society, but if the whole society is in upsurge, it is very difficult to control it.’ According to him, the police paid special attention to communally high-sensitive areas. These comprised either a small pocket of Hindu settlements in Muslim-dominated areas, or a pocket of Muslim villages in Hindu-dominated areas. He stated that the police mainly targeted these areas and tried to protect them. However, there are hundreds of these areas in one district. They talked to village leaders and urged them to maintain peace and order, but in some cases they failed.[5] As a result, the incidents of

Nellie, Mangaldoi and Gohpur took place. After the massacre, the government blamed the student leaders, whereas the student leaders blamed the government for conducting elections against the wishes of the people.

After the massacre took place, Indira Gandhi visited the Nellie relief camp. At the time, she refused to accept any responsibility on behalf of the government for the violence that had taken place and instead blamed the movement leaders for the violence. An *Indian Express* edition reported it under the headline, 'PM blames agitators for carnage'.

> A visibly upset Prime Minister on Monday squarely blamed Assam agitation leaders and 'their supporters here and elsewhere in the country' for the violence in the state. The violence has been building up since 1980 and the minorities have been feeling threatened, she said when a newsman asked her if the Government accepted the moral responsibility for the Nellie massacre. (*Indian Express* 22 February 1983)

The failure of the Congress Party's politics was not only that they could not predict the violence, but that they even sacrificed the Muslims, the major vote bank of the party. Although the Muslims were the ones who motivated people to cast their votes in the election, the government did not pay much attention to their security and instead concentrated the majority of security personnel on the electoral booths.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

By examining the cause of the violence which occurred during the 1983 election in Assam, particularly that of the Nellie incident, it becomes clear that the incident is the outcome of both the economic factor of land alienation as well as the political failure of the Congress (I) government at the Centre and partly the tense situation during the election period created by the AASU leaders.

There have been several studies on the election violence in Assam in 1983, particularly of the Nellie incident, and these are important in specifying both the local context of the Nellie area and the state

and national level politics. However, there are still several hitherto unexplored areas in these analyses of violence. One is that, although all communities suffered, the number of deaths of the Muslims is greater than that of other communities taken together. They bore the brunt of these attacks. This is not only particular to the election violence in Assam. In many cases, wherever large-scale communal riot takes place, the majority of the victims belong to the minority communities which happen to be mostly the Muslims. Although the Hindu organizations claim that it is the Muslims who initiate the attacks, in many cases, the Muslims have to bear the brunt of these conflicts.

Another point is that unlike the recent ethnic clashes, in the 1983 violence people could go back to their own places within a few months or maybe a year. Whereas in all the ethnic clashes taking place in Assam since the 1990s, particularly those in Barpeta and Kokrajhar, many people still feel insecure to go back and are compelled to stay in the refugee camps. Of course, in these two ethnic clashes the background of violence is totally different. In the 1990s, the Bodo movement and their demand for the separate homeland were quite active. Moreover, these attacks were initiated by the armed organizations, which were absent in the case of the Nellie massacre.

Thus, there are several aspects of the election violence which took place in 1983 that need to be investigated further. The land alienation among the tribes is still considered to be the major reason for the present-day ethnic clashes in Assam. However, if we focus on the displacement and the style of violence conducted by the armed organizations, we find the apparent difference between the 1983 election violence and the ethnic clashes which have been taking place since the 1990s.

NOTES

1. SOS Children's Village is an international organization that provides orphanage to children who have lost their parents or who are no longer able to live with them. The organization set up a village in Hojai right after the 1983 election violence in order to provide orphanage to the victims of the Nellie incident (http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/).

2. An interview with a Muslim villager in the attacked village on 12 November 2001.
3. An interview with a Tiwa villager in the Nellie area on 24 November 2001.
4. An interview with an ex-AASU participant in a Tiwa village in the Nellie area on 24 November 2001.
5. An Interview with an IPS officer (Assam cadre) in Delhi, 28 February 2003.

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10

The Displaced Santhals of Western Assam

Biswajit Chakrabarty

'Over 259,000 riot-affected people are still living in camps'—thus goes a headline of the first page of *The Assam Tribune* on 6 May 1999. The news reads as:

> More than 2,59,000 riot-affected people are still living in the relief camps in Kokrajhar district and the government has so far rehabilitated 28,802 affected persons. This was disclosed…in reply to a question …in the State Assembly toady…the government is finding it difficult to identify land for the rehabilitation of the affected people as most of them used to stay in forest land and as per a directive of the Supreme Court, the government cannot rehabilitate anyone in forest land… Instead of keeping the affected people in large numbers in big camps, step should be taken to keep smaller number of persons in smaller camps. He said that about 45,000 people are living in a camp at Sapkata and several untoward incidents involving the inmates took place in recent months…

On inquiry from the district administration of Kokrajhar in the first week of September 2000, the number of camp dwellers has been ascertained at 256,000. This shows that during the last one year some 3,000 persons have either been rehabilitated or have left the camps on their own for an uncertain future.

Who are these 'Over 259,000 (roughly 1.16 per cent of Assam's population) riot-affected people' in the relief camps of Kokrajhar

district? If the number of people in the relief camps of the adjoining districts of Bongaigaon and Dhubri is added to this, the figure will definitely account for at least 20 per cent of Assam's population. It will not be out of context to point out that even today according to the district administration there are some 80 camps out of which 56 (31 in Kokrajhar sub-division and 25 in Gossaigaon sub-division) are in Kokrajhar district and the rest are in Bongaigaon, Barpeta and Dhubri district.

Life in the camps is not at all what is to be expected in the light of all international conventions that the Government of India is a signatory to. At present, the government in these parts can be said to be firm believers in the total nutritional value of a little rice and whenever possible some salt as the panacea for hunger and malnutrition. Life under polythene sheets below the open skies during the heavy rains and severe winters that visit these sub-Himalayan regions cannot be too conducive to good health, given the condition of severe malnutrition. So the children, the women going through pregnancy and childbirth and the elderly are dying and have died by the thousands in these camps. Nearly one thousand (973, to be exact) of such deaths, mainly of children and elderly persons, that have taken place for want of food and medicine between May 1996 and April 1997 have been studied by Suruj Gogoi Manki, a leading activist of Jharkhandi Adivasi Sangram Parishad. (who was eventually murdered most brutally on 29 December 1999) under a situation of gripping tension and misunderstanding. Naturally the survey was incomplete. But the statistics of the sample survey is revealing. The camp-wise break-up according to that unpublished survey is given below.

S. No.	*Camp*	*Adult*	*Child*	*Total*	*S. No.*	*Camp*	*Adult*	*Child*	*Total*
1.	Haraputa	55	61	116	13.	Dhardhara	5	3	8
2.	Srirampur	19	15	34	14.	Malbhog	13	16	29
3.	Jacobpur	5	10	15	15.	Jaipur	31	53	84
4.	Salekati	7	4	11	16.	Saralpara	18	16	34
5.	Garuphella	31	37	68	17.	Shaljuri	33	28	61
6.	West Golajhar	14	21	35	18.	Dakhin Gongja	5	11	16

(*Continued*)

(*Continued*)

S. No.	*Camp*	*Adult*	*Child*	*Total*	*S. No.*	*Camp*	*Adult*	*Child*	*Total*
7.	Sulka	15	37	42	19.	Peripur	67	51	118
8.	Bharatnagar	24	39	63	20.	Guabari	13	25	38
9.	Sidli	1	7	8	21.	Alinagar	3	12	15
10.	Perijur	5	6	11	22.	Kachugaon	10	9	19
11.	Bismuri	5	2	7	23.	Singibill & Henubill	3	9	12
12.	Lotamari	12	16	28	24.	Unspecified	28	73	101

Source: Suruj G. Manki's unpublished survey.

People took shelter in the camps to save their lives but thanks to the uncaring dispensation of the ministry, they continue to die in large numbers thus completing the task of the abettors of violence in the so-called 'project ethnic-cleansing'.

This ethnic cleansing operation has its genesis in the manner in which the movement for fulfilment of genuine aspirations of the Bodos is conducted and also in the manner in which the successive governments tried to solve the issue.

On the basis of a demand for the Roman script, a broad political movement of the Bodos came to the foreground in the late sixties and continued to grow as a movement for identity assertion and identity fulfilment throughout the seventies and the early eighties. But when the first Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) ministry came to power in 1985, the Congress government at the centre led by Rajiv Gandhi played the 'Bodo card'. A section of impressionable youths was financed, armed, trained and sheltered to destabilize the ministry. The then AGP government also responded to it with state terrorism, which as recent developments bear out, have become counterproductive. Now, the heady wine of terrorism began to distort perceptions and out of the humus of genuine aspirations there arose the desire and the political planning for the worst kind of national chauvinism. The real dimension of this distortion of perspectives can be seen in the demographic politics of the present Bodo leadership.

During the early nineties when the Bodo movement for a separate state on the basis of the slogan of 'Divide Assam fifty-fifty' was surging forward, the solution that was seen to get ground was the creation

of a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) through a legislation. The BAC, as it is today, has come into existence in 1993 and even after completing almost seven years no election could be held to constitute the council. For long years, the Bodo leaders claimed that they had carried out their own census and found that the Bodos constituted the majority in the whole of Assam that lay north of the river Brahmaputra. But the official census has something else to say. The fact of the matter is that the Bodos constitute majorities only at the village and village cluster levels, that too only in certain parts of the region north of the Brahmaputra. This fact was well grasped by the three-member Central Government committee with K.S. Singh (Bhupinder) as the leading member.

This reality and the governmental commitment to include areas that have Bodo majority (and other areas where they are not for the sake of contiguity) in the Bodo autonomous area has led to a situation where the leaders of the Bodos are making their various bids for an extension of the present BAC area within Assam; for statehood within India and even secession from India. The situation can as well be summed up as continuous terror imposed upon the non-Bodos by a section of Bodo rebel leaders and mobs raised to a savage frenzy by the prospect of local domination. The periodic 'ethnic cleansing' operations are nothing but the most heinous expression of all these. Such an operation was first tried against the immigrant Muslims, one of the two most vulnerable communities, during 1994 and 1995. But from 1996 onwards the operation is mostly against the other most vulnerable community, the *jharkhandi*s and *adivasi*s.[1]

Hunger, malnutrition, disease and death always come far behind the question of security of the inmates of the camps. The security arrangements are so inadequate that the attackers can and did spring attacks on the camps with impunity on repeated occasions and killed a significant number of inmates. The most gruesome of these killings occurred in the camps sheltering the Muslims near Barpeta Road in 1994 and in the Borbil camp sheltering the Santhals (in Gossaigaon sub-division) in May 1998. On one occasion at least, the desperados even killed a Santhal woman by smashing her head with hammer inside the Kokrajhar hospital. It is therefore, no wonder that many former inmates of these camps, unable to return to their plundered

homes and fields on account of the continuing terror, flee to areas where the terrorist writ does not prevail and lead a life of utter destitution. And out of such desperation, there arises a section of lumpenised youth. While the females have in significant numbers taken to prostitution (which was until then a totally unknown practice for them), the males have become the cannon fodder for the great generals of the 'national' parties, which have been attempting to put into place an anti-Bodo terrorism. The resultant Santhal outfits with the totally lumpen elements have now become a threat even for the Santhal camp-dwellers in the form of extortionists and looters of the meagre ration that reaches the camps irregularly. The contradiction has grown to such an extent that quite a number of ordinary Santhal people including women have been murdered by them in the recent past for not obliging them or even for organizing resistance. The most glaring of these murders are those of Saraju Gogoi Manki, Anabrita Barla and of the three women TU activists of the Mornoi Tea Estate. Though initially terrorized, the ordinary Santhals in the camps have organized themselves at the behest of the Jharkhandi Adivasi Sangram Parishad to combat these *adivasi* terrorists and of late significant successes are being achieved.

Most of the inmates in these makeshift relief camps are Santhals and they are there since May 1996. The Supreme Court directed that no one could be rehabilitated in forestland. This means that before being driven away to camps by the fury of ethnic cleansing operations these people were living in unauthorized villages set up on forestlands. But why were they displaced from their native villages in the first place to seek shelter through encroachment into forest areas? Because they were, even before the riot, a group of displaced persons. As a colonial administrative measure to curb the Santhal and *adivasi* militancy of the 1890s, there was a dispersal of a large number of Santhals from the Santhal Pargana of the present state of Jharkhand: one group was sent to Mauritius, another group to West Indies and a third to the 'agency area' created around the river Sonkosh. As far as the story goes, this agency area was established around the year 1880 at the behest of one British Officer—Kera Papa (as he was known to the settlers of that time) with a total land area of 57,930 *bigha* 1 *katha* 19 *lecha*.[2] In the agency

area, initially 43 revenue villages were created to accommodate the Santhal population that was brought in. After the reorganization of the states, some of these villages became part of West Bengal and the rest remained with Assam. Reportedly the Government of Assam has in 1977 declared the agency area as a Tribal Belt. (Incidentally, the Gossaingaon community development block, which includes the Assam part of the Santhal Agency area, has a meagre 8.86 per cent of ST population.)[3] Over one hundred years, the original population like any other population grew and grew at a certain rate to become saturated at a certain point of time. This made the people encroach on the nearby forest areas in search of shelter and livelihood. This process was going on for more than half a century and for decades people were living happily and amicably with people of other tribes and communities in these villages. Nowhere can any semblance of forests be seen. In fact in 1998, the Kokrajhar D.C. had submitted a proposal to the State and the Union Governments to denotify these 'Reserved Forests', which exist only on paper, so as to facilitate the process of rehabilitation, but without any avail.

These Santhals, along with the immigrant Muslims once displaced from their native homes in the imperialist interest of the British rulers, have from time to time been further displaced by natural disasters like floods and erosion, moving in search of a source of livelihood. And now they are facing the cruelest form of displacement in the face of one of the worst kinds of national chauvinism.

For political expediency, the present governments at the centre and at the state may choose to underplay the extent of miseries the people in these camps are suffering from, but the conscientious section of civil society must not fail to apply its mind to seek a solution that does not put human dignity to disgrace.

NOTES

1. People referred to here are so described by the author, being originally natives of places known for their identity assertion as Jharkhand.
2. This account is obtained from the local elders of Srirampur area.
3. Census of India, 1991.

11

IDPs of Western Assam: A Study of Conflict-induced Displacement

SUBHASH BARMAN

The society in Assam has been witnessing the problem of conflict-induced displacement since the beginning of the postcolonial period. The phenomenon has already threatened thousands of lives as well as the stability of the peripheral areas of the state. Assam has been a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-caste society for hundreds of years. But some of the communities have always been lagging behind the ruling higher castes of Assam since the colonial period. These communities face the threat of being marginalized in the larger society. Various socio-cultural movements that took place during this period did not penetrate deep into their society. The Santhals of Assam are one of such marginalized communities caught in the midst of interethnic violence since 1996 in the districts of Bongaigaon, Dhubri and Kokrajhar of lower Assam.

The Santhals of Assam may be divided into two groups—the tea labourers, including ex-tea labourers and the ordinary peasants. The Santhals of lower Assam are basically ordinary peasants. Amalendu Guha observed that the planters made the worst use of semi-feudal methods while reducing the free labourer to a kind of serfdom. Like the tea labourers, the Santhal peasants have been marginalized by colonial and postcolonial policies. In lower Assam, on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, lakhs of ordinary Santhal peasants have been living for over hundred years until the beginning

of the Bodo movement in the mid-1980s, which as we know cost hundreds of Santhal and non-Santhal lives and displaced thousands of them from their homes. Till then, the larger society did not seem to be aware of their presence in the area. The emergence of Bodo movement has brought their vulnerabilities into focus. The Bodos' search for an exclusive homeland (the proposed Bodoland) has had its effect on the non-Bodos who were or faced the threat of being pushed out of the proposed Bodoland area. Such Bodo militant groups as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) reportedly unleashed brutal violence against the non-Bodos. Santhals of the region who are otherwise very backward in terms of their development became the soft target of the militants.

The Bodos are the largest tribal community of Assam with 6 per cent of the total population of the state. The Santhals were immigrants to Assam. These Santhal peasants came to Assam in a particular historical context. They predominantly hailed from the Chotanagpur region of central India. The Permanent Settlement (1793) by the colonial authorities and the regime of exploitation by the landlords that it brought into existence over the tribal people led to the breakdown of their traditional system of ownership over land. The *diku*s (non-tribal money-lenders) made the problem of land alienation all the more acute. Again, the colonial state's forest policy not only made forests public property but also deprived the native tribal people of their traditional rights over forest resources. They collected a large part of their requirement from forests. The consecutive famines of 1851, 1864, 1874 and the one from 1892 to 1908 also forced a large number of Santhals to leave their homes in search of livelihood. The Chotanagpur region also saw a number of Santhal uprisings against the foreign rule as well as the *diku*s.

Some of them had chosen Assam as their destination for resettlement. It would be important to recollect here that during the 19th century, Assam was a thinly populated state with a rapidly declining population. The Burmese invasion, civil war, *kala azar*, and so on had drastically depopulated Assam. A large part of its land remained unutilized. The colonial administrators of Assam too encouraged new settlement there from other regions of India in order to get the fertile land cultivated, thereby enhancing their land revenue.

Likewise, Santhals were encouraged under the orders of Stuart Bayley (in 1886) to colonize the district of Goalpara—defraying their expenses on travel from home besides advances free of interest until they could reap a crop of their own (Barpujari 1993: 48–49). For over hundred years Santhals have been living in the area with the Bodos and other communities. But socio-economically they have been lagging far behind the rest of the larger society. Their representation in the state, economy and in the socio-cultural life is invisible although they have been treating Assam as their own home by accepting its customs, culture and language.

The Santhals happen to be the victims of one of the worst ever ethnic violence in the area. The violence of 1996 cost more than 1,000 Santhal lives. As a result, many of them were forced to leave their homes. Since 1996, more than 20,000 Santhals, including children, have been living in different relief camps without even the minimum facilities of living. Along with these Santhals, people from other communities like the Rabhas, Nepalis and Bodos have been sheltering in relief camps. The largest number of inmates consists of the Santhal peasants. These relief camps are also not spared by the militants. The Santhals' agricultural land has been occupied by members of other communities. The ration supplied by the government has been insufficient to meet their requirements. The Santhals have to collect fuel wood and other essential items from the nearby jungles. But the Bodo militants and the government are determined not to allow them to enter the forests and when they do enter, they become easy prey to the militant attacks.

The Santhals have also gradually developed their own strategy of self-defence by organizing their own militant organizations like Adivasi Cobra Militant Force and Birsa Commando Force. Armed with guns, pistols and bows, a section of Santhals has been indulging in violent activities. Such violence and counter-violence have only led to the spiralling of violence.

THE VICTIMS AND THEIR CAMPS

It has been revealed that there are more than 200,000 displaced people who have been living in 78 relief camps in Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar

districts of lower Assam since 1996. Earlier in 1993, immigrant Muslims from Barpeta district witnessed large-scale massacre and displacement. The Bodo militants in 1998 again attacked and displaced 25,000 people—both Santhals and Nepalis living in Assam for years. Again in 1999 in the district of Dhubri, 7,000 Santhals were displaced. Few families of Bengali Hindus also faced displacement during that time. Out of 250,000 persons, 70,000 are children. In the Gossaigaon sub-division 166,000 inmates have taken shelter in 39 relief camps (see Table 11.1). The number of children is estimated to be more than 45,000. In the sub-division, 25,000 families have been struggling for survival in the relief camps living a sub-human life. Santhals constitute the largest part of them. But along with the Santhals, a few thousand Bodo and 24 Rabha families have also taken shelter in relief camps. In Kachugaon relief camp, 33,000 people from 4,965 families have taken shelter. Out of that, the number of children is more than 6,600. In Sapkata relief camp, 36,932 inmates from 174 Santhal villages have taken shelter. The children account for 12,720 of these. Sapkata and Kachugaon relief camps are the largest relief camps of Kokrajhar district. Two thousand five hundred eighty four inmates from 10 Santhal villages have taken shelter in Srirampur relief camp. There are a few relief camps for displaced Bodos as well. In Saraibil, 7,653 Bodo persons have been living in relief camps since 1996. Out of that, the children account for 2,549. Like Saraibil relief camp, in Jambuguri relief camp 3,619 Bodo inmates from seven villages have taken shelter. Again, people from one Rabha village have been living in Ghaska relief camp.

As these displaced people have been living in the same relief camps for several years, which are meant to be temporary shelters, the environment has become most unhygienic for human beings. The relief camps have virtually become concentration camps. The inmates have been deprived of minimum requirements of living. There are no medical facilities for these displaced people. As a result, death due to different diseases becomes very common. There is no facility for safe drinking water. There is little opportunity of primary education for the children. The relief camps are not free from the militant attacks. The inmates of these camps cannot go out as there is always the possibility of being attacked.

Table 11.1 Present Status of Displacement of Gosaigoan Sub-division in Kokrajhar District

S. No.	*Name of relief camps*	*Community*	*No. of villages*	*No. of families*	*Adults*	*Minors*	*Total*
1.	Kachugaon	Adivasi	43	4,965	24,819	6,112	30,931
2.	Kachugaon	Adivasi	12	380	1,324	541	1,865
3.	Nabinnagar	Adivasi	1	103	576	103	679
4.	Gurufella	Adivasi	38	1,458	5,874	1,931	7,805
5.	Bhadeyaguri	Adivasi	51	1,715	8,349	2,531	7,805
6.	Joymagoan	Adivasi	16	1,348	6,451	2,439	8,890
7.	Joyma	Adivasi	4	145	508	180	688
8.	Bhawraguri	Adivasi	3	80	269	155	424
9.	Mokrambil	Adivasi	11	335	1,285	312	1,597
10.	Bashbir	Adivasi	4	164	655	183	838
11.	Habrubil	Adivasi	33	700	2,880	929	3,809
12.	Balagaon	Adivasi	21	2,410	10,386	5,565	15,951
13.	Sapkata	Adivasi	92	1,057	4,554	1,804	6,358
14.	Sapkata	Adivasi	82	3,920	19,658	10,916	30,574
15.	Padmabil	Adivasi	17	300	1,154	482	1,636
16.	Padmakchari	Adivasi	4	199	522	122	644
17.	Satyapur	Adivasi	2	55	238	95	333
18.	Singibill	Adivasi	1	42	148	59	207
19.	Telipara	Adivasi	19	437	2,149	659	2,808
20.	Matiajuri	Adivasi	6	155	703	345	1,048
21.	Srirampura	Adivasi	10	402	1,668	916	2,584
22.	Panbari	Adivasi	5	287	1,391	598	2,818
23.	Janali	Bodo	5	287	1,391	598	1,989
24.	Saraibil	Bodo	14	1,089	5,104	2,549	7,653
25.	Jambuguri	Bodo	7	498	2,836	783	3,619
26.	Ghaska	Bodo	1	24	185	65	250
27.	Maktaigaon	Bodo	5	258	1,560	431	1,991
28.	Pakriguri	Bodo	3	130	770	206	976
29.	Jaraguri	Bodo	6	258	1,241	277	1,518
30.	Bairal	Bodo	17	814	2,885	593	3,478
31.	Borabadha	Bodo	1	178	800	505	1,304
32.	Dhaolabari	Bodo	2	65	306	166	472
33.	Jaleswari	Bodo	6	401	1,809	1,001	2,810
34.	Sialmari	Bodo	2	99	412	156	568
35.	Odaguri	Bodo	2	39	175	80	255
36.	Stafegodwn	Bodo	5	144	657	237	894
37.	Hakma	Bodo	9	366	1,585	545	2,130
38.	Khasiabari	Bodo	7	494	2,836	783	3,619
	Total			25,900	120,134	46,106	166,240

Source: (Total inmate position in 1998) Govt of Assam.

The State Government sponsored relief camps get rations for five days of the month. So the government-supplied food is insufficient. Starvation among them becomes a common phenomenon. The Government of Assam has tried to rehabilitate some families of displaced people with monetary help as well as by building small houses under the 'Indira Awas Yojna'. Since 1993, the government has rehabilitated 36,213 displaced families. Out of that number, 3,293 families got their houses. A few thousands of people have returned to their homes. In the district of Kokrajhar, 219,104 persons remain outside any kind of rehabilitation programme (Agradoot 2000). The government policy has been inadequate to meet the situation. Though lakhs of people from marginalized groups have been struggling for survival under sub-human conditions, the government has not shown any interest in creating a peaceful atmosphere to enable the displaced persons to return to their homes. It has declared some of the inmates as encroachers of forest reserves and stopped their re-entry. Those who returned to their previous villages found that their agricultural land and cattle have been taken over by others. Neither the Government of Assam nor the Government of India has taken the issue as a serious concern. It would be worthwhile to mention here that even an international institution like the UNICEF has shown interest in the welfare of the displaced children. In the district of Kokrajhar, out of 25,000 inmates, 12,000 are children and women. The government as well as the larger society's insensitive attitudes towards the issue has made the situation more complex.

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12

Nobody's People: Muslim IDPs of Western Assam

Uddipana Goswami

On NH 31, a few kilometres before reaching Bongaigaon, which hosts the Bongaigaon Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited, lies Goroimari village. On either side of the highway that passes through Goroimari are visible a number of small hutments, most of them hardly four feet by seven. Beyond the hutments, river Aie can be seen flowing by. A signboard identifies this settlement as the Goroimari Relief Camp.

Driving towards the camp from Bijni which is the closest town and sub-divisional headquarter—Goroimari falls under the Bijni sub-division of Chirang district—what strikes one the most is the presence of children playing or running around dangerously close to speeding vehicles. The author was told, though exact dates have been forgotten, that a small girl from the camp was run over on the highway a year or two ago. The hutments also seem too close to the highway. In November 2005, a loaded coal truck fell on one of the huts killing a newly-wed couple on their first night of marriage (Barman and Ahmed 2005: 7).

Driving past, one can see a few shops, interspersed with the hutments, lining the highway. If one is observant, in winter months one would also see rugs of a kind on bamboo bars placed horizontally between vertical poles. Closer inspection shows intricate embroidery on these rugs made out of old saris. These are *katha*s and they are as

strong an indicator of the identity of the camp inmates for the casual observer as other cultural markers such as attire—they are Muslim people of East Bengali origin in Assam. And East Bengal, which became East Pakistan in 1947 and Bangladesh in 1971, is famous for its embroidered quilt called *nakshi katha* which forms part of the repertoire of folk skills of East Bengalis, especially women.[1]

MUSLIM IDPs IN KOKRAJHAR AND CHIRANG

The Goroimari relief camp, like seven others in the contiguous districts of Kokrajhar and Chirang, houses Muslim people of East Bengali origin in Assam, a community also commonly called the *Sar-Sapori* Muslims or *Miya*s. These camps include Sandlartari, Nangalbhanga, Bengtol, Bangaldoba, Hapachara, Sidalsati and Tapatari, besides Goroimari. Following the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement on Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in 2003,[2] many administrative boundaries were reshuffled to create the four districts under BTC, and the district of Chirang was carved out of portions of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon. It is a poignant pointer towards the chaos in BTC, today that even after two years of demarcation of its territory, there is much confusion regarding which district these camps fall under. For instance, the Goroimari camp which falls within Chirang is, even in recent representations identified as coming under the charge of the Bongaigaon district administration. In fact, all official demands for relief and rehabilitation by inmates of this and most other camps of Chirang district are placed before the Bongaigaon district administration. Others, which before the Memorandum of Settlement had fallen under Kokrajhar (Bengtol, for instance), approach the Kokrajhar district administration. Indeed, inmates of an *adivasi* camp[3] at Bengtol claimed to have never even seen their sub-divisional officer.[4]

Further, there is no single voice in the district administrative departments regarding the status of relief and rehabilitation, one of the 40 state subjects purportedly transferred to BTC, though BTC officials claim that it is under their charge.[5] The Memorandum of Settlement of 2003, however, clearly states that the special

rehabilitation programme for all victims of ethnic violence 'who are at present living in relief camps in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon and so on shall be completed by the Government of Assam with active support of BTC. Necessary funds for their rehabilitation shall be provided by the Government of India and lands which are free from all encumbrances required for such rehabilitation shall be made available by the BTC'. In spite of this, confusion prevails over areas of intervention by both BTC and Government of Assam which has at many times led to neglect of certain areas of relief on the one hand, and on the other, caused overlapping and utterly wasteful expenditure under the same heads.[6]

EAST BENGALI MUSLIM SETTLEMENT IN WESTERN ASSAM

The Muslim people of East Bengali origin are those who immigrated to the colonial province of Assam after the state sponsored or facilitated their settlement there since the first decade of the 20th century, though in some cases they migrated even earlier.[7] There were various routes the immigrants took to come and settle in land-abundant Assam during the colonial period, but one of the most favoured routes was through western Assam, most of which till 1983 comprised the undivided Goalpara district. Through this western frontier—Kokrajhar and Chirang are the western-most districts of Assam on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river—flow of goods and people had been taking place in all periods of history. Indeed, western Assam has been the connection between North East India—most of which once comprised the province of Assam—and mainland India through Bengal, both eastern and western.

The Muslim immigrants in Western Assam came into contact with the indigenous populations there when they entered this sub-montane belt where the indigenous people, especially the Bodos, had been living. In many cases this happened during the first waves of immigration when particularly the railways[8] running across the sub-montane tea belt provided the immigrants easy transport to these sparsely populated areas. There have also been instances, however, of migration as recent as 20–25 years ago[9] into western Assam from the

neighbouring districts of Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta and Bongaigaon as also from the further off districts of central and southern Assam. There are also those who came from neighbouring Jalpaiguri in West Bengal (DC, Kokrajhar 2000). Allegations, not entirely unfounded as first hand experience on the Indo-Bangladesh border would manifest, are also often raised about infiltration of illegal immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh and this has proved to be one of the greatest hurdles towards creating social consensus in Assam with regard to this community. In fact, on many occasions this has been used as a justification for wholesale persecution of the entire community in Assam.

THE HISTORY OF DISCORD

When the immigrants initially came to Assam, they had a definite economic advantage over the indigenous people. Elsewhere, the present author has detailed (2005c):

> These indigenous peoples at the time were at various stages of development from swidden to settled cultivation. The Bodo especially were swidden cultivators traditionally and had only recently taken to settled cultivation (Guha 2000: 33). Again, they were used to barter economy and when the settlers came, were still struggling to cope with the money economy introduced by colonial rule.[10]

The migrants, on the other hand … were not only adept at settled cultivation but also more enterprising and commercially inclined. They had much scope for using their advantages to the disadvantage of the indigenous people, which they did if oral accounts collected during the course of field interviews are anything to go by. To cite one of these accounts, brinjals and potatoes were introduced by immigrant Muslims in many Bodo areas. Cases of unequal exchange between the two communities of small numbers of these novelties against huge quantities of foodgrain form part of childhood recollections of a few elderly Bodo individuals.[11]

Growing political awareness and nativist sentiments among the Bodos since mid-20th century, however, brought the two communities into confrontation. The immigrants already had an articulate

political leadership that drew on the rhetoric of humanitarianism, economic and political rights and advantages, and so on to justify continued influx and settlement of landless East Bengalis in Assam.

In postcolonial Assam, the scenario took a slightly different turn in that the binary oppositions of indigenous and settler rights now overtly had another dimension added to it as the Asomiya-speaking—largely Hindu—people assumed the role of the 'mainstream'. The opposition(s) could now be identified between the 'ethnic' Asomiya,[12] indigenous people of Assam and settler communities, with the 'ethnic' Asomiya enforcing a policy of assimilation—an example of which was the Assam Official Language Act of 1960 that declared: 'Assamese shall be used for all or any of the official purpose, of the State of Assam'[13]—on the others as a precondition of inclusion.[14] The settler communities, most notably the Muslims of East Bengali origin had already recognized the necessity of such an assimilative approach if they were to avail of the opportunities that were open to the mainstream. The indigenous communities, on the other hand, attempted a reversal of the assimilation that had already occurred. The anti-Asomiya slogans of the Bodo movement have their genesis in this attempt that has proved to be a very potent tool of political resistance.

As identities thus continued to be reconstructed or remodelled in relation to the mainstream, changes also continued to take place in the equation between the Bodos and immigrant Muslims of western Assam. The Bodo agitation for a separate homeland that was launched in 1987 initially directed most violence and vituperation towards the 'ethnic' Asomiya and Koch-Rajbongshi people[15] in the proposed Bodo homeland, which initially comprised the entire north bank of the Brahmaputra valley—or roughly half the territory of the current geo-political extent of Assam.[16] The year 1989 especially saw large-scale violence against Rajbongshi people in Bodo areas and sporadic incidences of violence against 'ethnic' Asomiya, so much so that till date Asomiya officers consider being transferred to western Assam as 'punishment posting'. This was the time when the walls of Kokrajhar town, the heartland of the Bodo agitation, wore graffiti proclaiming Bodo–immigrant Muslim unity. One such graffiti read:

Bodo-Muslim bhai-bhai/Marwarir taka chai/Asamiar matha chai: Bodos and Muslims are brothers/We need the Marwaris'[17] money/ And the Asomiya's head.[18]

The scenario changed somewhat with the coming of the new decade, a change in the ruling party in the State Government—same ruling party was in power at the centre—and a new approach at the level of the Central Government in New Delhi that sought to conclude the agitation it had allegedly fuelled and sustained in an effort to destabilize the State Government that was so far ruled by a regional party.[19] A three-member expert committee—the Expert Committee on Plains Tribes of Assam (ECOPTA) was appointed to:

1. determine the area for Bodos and other plains tribes to the north of river Brahmaputra.
2. make recommendations as to the autonomy, legislative, administrative and financial powers that may be given to them.[20]

It had become evident to the leaders of the Bodo agitation by now that a separate state was not on offer, and a conscious effort was noticeable on the part of the leadership to garner the support of Asomiya intellectuals towards their right to self-determination even within the geo-political ambit of Assam. Expressions of solidarity from the intellectual and political leaderships of both communities became especially noticeable in the years leading up to the signing of the first Memorandum of Settlement with the Bodo leadership headed by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and its political front Bodo Peoples' Action Committee (BPAC) in 1993.[21]

This accord[22] provided for the creation of a Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) but it was a much watered down version of autonomy than the one suggested by the ECOPTA which submitted its report in 1992 favouring large scale devolution and decentralization of power. The report was shelved. Though providing for an autonomous council, the Bodo accord of 1993 did not delimit the territory for the proposed Bodo homeland and merely laid 50 per cent Bodo population in an area as the criterion for inclusion within Bodoland.

Settler influx having been immense and sustained since the colonial times, and resource alienation among the Bodo an inescapable reality, there were many areas in the proposed homeland where the Bodo were a minority. The only way to create majority then was to exterminate some of the settlers, and the first victims of a massive ethnic cleansing drive after the signing of the Bodo accord of 1993 were the Muslims of East Bengali origin. The fact that they were the *bete noire* of every other community in Assam—especially of the 'ethnic' Asomiya who live under the constant fear of minoritization and Islamization through the sizeable presence of this community in Assam[23]—might have prompted, however subtly, their selection as targets.

THE CARNAGE

The first attacks began in the wee hours of 7 October 1993 and continued till 11 October 1993 in parts of the districts of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon (these areas of Bongaigaon since 2003 fall under Chirang). Eyewitnesses tell horrific tales of human slaughter and suffering.[24] Despite resistance put up by a small group of people forewarned by recent sporadic incidents of violence against the community, the heavily armed Bodo militia managed to kill and displace thousands of people. Officially, 3,658 families or about 18,000 people were affected (DC, Kokrajhar 2000). Some fled to nearby areas within Assam, others fled to Bhutan from where they were herded out unceremoniously.[25] It took days and weeks for some people to locate their family members who were alive, and had run helter-skelter and were now housed in temporary relief camps. Meanwhile, arson continued in their villages and homes in a phased manner. Barman and Ahmed (2005: 7) have identified three phases of the militant attacks in October 1993 as: 'First phase by killing peoples (sic), second phase by looking (sic) and third phase by arsoning'. According to a memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister of Assam by the Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon Saranarthi Committee in 1996, there were more than 20,000 Muslims living in 18 relief camps in the two districts by that year (Hussain 2000).

INTERIM RELIEF

Many ad hoc measures were taken immediately after the violence erupted. Local educational institutions and government buildings became relief camps till makeshift shelters were built elsewhere in Jamunaguri, Ananda Bazar, Patabari, Kailamoila, Tulsidangi, Amteka, Bhawraguri, Baghmara, Janata Bazar, Balajani and Chechapani (Bongaigaon and North Salmara Districts Minority Students' Union 1997). Gratuitous Relief (GR) in the form of rice, lentils and oil was provided to the camp inmates, and according to inmates of some camps, these were supplied for as long as five years after the attacks.[26] By 2000, there were eight relief camps in the Kokrajhar district alone which housed 988 families, and a total of 10,481 inmates (DC Kokrajhar 2000).

As on December 2005, however, there are eight camps—not established by the government—in both Kokrajhar and Chirang, the inmates of which allege that around the year 2000, they were forced to vacate the camps established by the government in both the districts as their GR had been stopped and all sources of livelihood had dried up; they could not stay in the camp and go looking for work outside as they were not allowed to move out of the camp by the security personnel under whose protection they lived. Instances of aggression and oppression by these security personnel inside the camp have also been recounted to the author. Further, they saw no hopes of rehabilitation by the government. Therefore, through the agency of a few leaders and local *dewan*s or *matbar*s,[27] the inmates of most of the camps took land on lease and set up camp in the areas they now live in and which have been named earlier.[28]

The camp at Goroimari is on a piece of land leased out by a school teacher, Ismail Hussein. The Hapachara camp is located on land owned by a local Gaon Panchayat President whose son now acts as a middleman and recruiter for political parties like the United Democratic Front (UDF), purportedly representing the minorities. The camps have proved a fertile ground for political proselytizing for many political parties. Further, for the land that would otherwise cost a nominal revenue payment to the state, these landowners now earn an annual rent of about Rs 20,000 from the camp inmates, the

difference being calculated in terms of income lost due to leasing out of agricultural land for habitation. The case of the Goroimari camp is particularly interesting—the camp was initially on the banks of the river Aie, some distance from the highway. But in 2004, the river rose during the monsoon, and the people unused to cultivating or living in floodplains—having lived on *kayem* or non-riverine land throughout[29]—were forced to move yet again, this time to their current location beside the highway. The section relating to 'Road side land' in the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act 1886, which governs all matters relating to land in Assam clearly states that:

> 23. (1) Nothing in these rules shall entitle any person to obtain a lease in respect of land within 75 feet of the centre line of a public road. Any person occupying or encroaching on such land shall be liable to ejectment under Rule 18 of the Rules.
>
> *Explanation*—The expression "public road" includes (I) any road maintained by the State Government or by a local authority and (II) any other road declared by the State Government to be a public road for the purpose of this rule.[30]

Legally therefore, the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are now on government land, the original owner's land having been submerged by the river in 2004. This submerged land for which he had a *patta* or land deed has since resurfaced but the IDPs continue to live beside the highway and what is more, continue to pay rent to him for land that is not his.

(NON) REHABILITATION

Most of the money received as GR was used for acquiring leases such as the ones the Goroimari and Hapachara camp inmates pay. When the ethnic cleansing and arson took place in 1993, the state announced immediate compensation on the basis of loss, as reported by the afflicted, and one-time grants of Rs 2,000–3,000 were given to people displaced from certain areas.[31] Subsequently however, this policy was revoked and a GR of Rs 10,000 per family was announced for all. Though government sources deny any overlap in grant disbursement, allegations are raised that some people were benefitted

under both schemes of compensation. Some others allege they were given only part of the GR while the rest was given in the form of tin sheets for roofing.[32] In some cases, middlemen both from within the community and outside, also siphoned off a certain percentage of the GR as payment for services rendered towards expediting the release of the grant. There was also an instance when the sub-divisional and circle officers of Bijni reportedly misappropriated Rs 400,000 by entering fictitious names as beneficiaries (Bongaigaon and North Salmara Districts Minority Students' Union 1997).

The continued burden of paying the land rent rests heavy upon the inmates most of whom have no sustained means of earning a livelihood. As one inmate at the Hapachara camp told the author: 'We are like birds who leave their nests in the morning in search of food and livelihood and return home in the evening, sometimes empty handed'.[33]

Touching and true though this is in the case of most inmates, it however only tells half the story. The other half is of those people who have left the camps and settled elsewhere to alternative livelihoods. Some of them are quite affluent, and the author has met a displaced family that paid a disclosed amount of Rs 150,000 to Bodo insurgents who had kidnapped a kin.[34] There are also those who maintain establishments outside the camp and live there in the hope that whatever benefits come to the inmates from the state sooner or later will also be made available to them. Thus there are school teachers and other professionals in the camps who live there but occasionally. Otherwise comfortably off, these people actively participate in the occasional activism that the camp inmates are roused to by various leaders and political parties from time to time.[35]

One such event was organized by MP Golam Osmani in November 2005, where a large group of displaced people from the Goroimari camp were taken to New Delhi for a sit-in demonstration. After a meeting with and petition to the president of the ruling party at the centre, the agitators were assured of quick action and early rehabilitation. A few thousand rupees have reportedly been sanctioned thereafter and a plot of land identified for building houses for the camp inmates at Salabila under the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY).[36] After the initial enthusiasm however, the project has been reportedly abandoned and all that remains are the remnants of the police

outpost constructed at the site. This has been the fate of most other rehabilitation projects that have been undertaken from time to time. Though 201 families out of 269 at Tapatari were given houses constructed under the IAY (Barman and Ahmed 2005: 16), elsewhere the projects have come to a halt owing to various reasons—most often opposition from local populations in the proposed rehabilitation sites who feel their accessibility to the grazing fields and other resources will get limited or blocked altogether if these non-local people are settled in their localities. In the case of the Salabila rehabilitation scheme, resistance came from the displaced people themselves who objected to the selection of a site on the riverbank where there was obvious imminent danger of erosion and further displacement in subsequent floods.[37]

It is also not possible, according to the administration, to resettle these people in the areas from which they were displaced in the first place. Though an initial effort was made, resistance from militant Bodo organizations forced people to flee yet again. Almost all the villages that had been attacked in 1993 were encroached villages and the people who lived there had no land deeds. They had migrated from nearby districts of Assam and West Bengal to these areas since the 1960s when the administration had denotified these areas from the list of reserved forests. They however, had not been given rights to the land. Therefore, when the question of rehabilitation arose, it was easy for the administration to initially dismiss most cases as not being under their jurisdiction. Many of the afflicted people were told to approach their respective district administrations rather than the administrations of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon (now Chirang) for relief and rehabilitation. There were also instances when police personnel alleged these people were Bangladeshis, illegally living in Assam[38] who had no right to avail of the state sponsored relief.

ALLIED PROBLEMS

Loss of Political Voice

Displacement has created many other problems for the camp inmates. Among them is the deprivation of their voting rights. Erin Mooney

and Balkees Jarrah (2004), in their proposals for safeguarding IDP voting rights, for instance, urge that

> … elections are an important means by which IDPs can have a say in the political, economic and social decisions affecting their lives. As citizens of the country in which they are uprooted, IDPs are entitled to vote and participate in public affairs, a right which is affirmed in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

But since India does not even recognize IDPs as a category, it is impossible for the IDPs of Assam to avail themselves of this right. The displaced of Kokrajhar and Chirang allege that because they cannot return—for fear of life and limb—to their places of settlement from which they were displaced by Bodo militants, and because they are enlisted in the electoral lists there, they have not been able to vote since 1993. Again, because they are enlisted as belonging to those villages from which they were displaced, benefits which they could have otherwise availed of—like the facilities under the Below Poverty Line (BPL) schemes of the state—are closed to them.

Closed Livelihood Options

The BPL census is conducted by the Ministry of Rural Development to identify and target the BPL persons under various programmes of the ministry. In the absence of any livelihood options, most of the camp inmates demand that the benefits of these programmes be extended to them. Divorced from their land that was their mainstay, most camp inmates are neither equipped nor inclined towards any other trade. Most of them have thus turned daily wage labourers with no guarantee of a regular income. A few enterprising ones among them have taken to petty trade—the shops inside and along the Goroimari camp are an instance of this. Others work in nearby fields and fisheries. Some of the women also earn their bread by working in neighbouring hotels and households. Within the camp itself, a gifted few stitch *katha*s and earn between Rs 80 and 100 from this labour. There has however been no effort to use this or any other skills of the women of the camps commercially. No governmental or non-governmental agency has reportedly aided the inmates in this

direction. Issues like skill enhancement and livelihood options that could have enabled the inmates have not been addressed at all.

Interestingly however, there are a few non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with and among the *adivasi* population displaced in subsequent ethnic violence in 1996 and 1998. The Lutheran World Service India (LWS-I) for example has adopted a number of villages and its initial proposal was:

1. To facilitate the resettlement of the families, which are still in the camps and support the resource poor families who have left the relief camps this year.
2. To provide/facilitate necessary infrastructure support to be successful in the life in a new settlement.
3. To facilitate the formation and sustainability of inclusive self-help groups and community based organizations.
4. To improve resource and knowledge base, managerial skills and local expertise within the communities to address socio-economic challenges.
5. To facilitate application of sector specific knowledge, skills and capabilities to enhance quality of life.
6. To facilitate access to resources and services from relevant organizations to improve livelihood, health, education and social status.[39]

Under such an approach then, both Bodos and Adivasis displaced in the violence of the said two years have been benefited; the religious factor has no doubt played a very important role in attracting organizations like LWS-I to work among these communities, a sizeable proportion of which are Christians with more being converted through subsequent evangelization.

Issues of Education, Health

In the case of the Muslim IDPs however, with no prospects of proselytizing, such NGOs have stayed away. Muslim organizations like the Jamiat Ulema-ul-Hind have reportedly intervened from time to time through occasional grants and gifts but no sustained efforts

have been made on their behalf. Perhaps the only visible sustained intervention by the Jamiat has been the setting up of a *madrasah*[40] at the Goroimari camp for educating the boys in the camp. It is a residential *madrasah* to which boys from neighbouring districts also come. The salary of the school teachers is paid by the Jamiat; local Muslims also make regular donations.

At the Goroimari camp itself is a primary school set up under the state sponsored Asom Sarbashiksha Abhijan Mission, which aims to extend education to all. Compared to the *madrasah* it is in a pitiable state with only one room with a roof and three walls, no furniture and just one teacher who gets a pittance of Rs 1,000 per month as salary. Since the *madrasah* levies a nominal admission fee, some parents send their children to this school, though girls for the most part remain uneducated. Many of the young girls are sent to towns and cities to serve as household maids. As often as not, early marriage and pregnancy ruin their health and there is no medical care available to them. Indeed, state health services are received only sporadically. Medicine Sans Frontiers (MSF), which has a base in nearby Bongaigaon, is the only NGO that brings medical aid, again only occasionally.

CONCLUSION

Thus, ad hocism marks everything about the displaced people in the two districts under study. Everything from their habitation to health care is ad hoc, and since this is the best way to retain control over them, the leaders, local patrons and the administration prefer to keep them that way. Prolonging the situation means lengthening the possibility of gains from all sides for certain sections—be the gains monetary, political or religious. The administration's approach to ameliorating the condition of IDPs is typified in its adoption of a coherent action plan—contingent plans had so far been in implementation—only as late as 2000 for the Muslim people displaced in 1993. Then too, it was a combined action plan, without any consideration for differing situations and standpoints, for all people whether Muslim, Bodo and Adivasi, displaced in ethnic violence in 1993, 1996 and 1998.

And by the time the action plan had been put in place, it was already impressed upon the displaced people that it was time to move out of state patronage.

The state's attitude is perhaps best expressed by Justice Safiqul Haque, Chairperson of the Assam Minority Commission: how can the state take responsibility for the offspring of people affected by the riots when it takes so much effort and time to rehabilitate their parents who were the ones actually directly afflicted?[41]

NOTES

1. For details about the craft of *katha* as part of Bangladeshi folk culture see Goswami (2006).
2. Full text available at http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/documents/index.html. Last accessed: 27 December 2005.
3. The Adivasis were targets of ethnic cleansing drives in 1996 and 1998.
4. Field interviews, April 2005.
5. Interviews in district administration offices under State Government and BTC Secretariat, Kokrajhar, April–August, 2005.
6. Informant Sujit Baglary, Extra-Assistant Commissioner, Relief and Rehabilitation, Kokrajhar district, December 2005.
7. For a detailed discussion of the coming of East Bengali immigrants into Assam see Dev and Lahiri (1985), Goswami (2005b), Guha (1977), Kar (1990).
8. The railroad had been extended to connect Assam to West Bengal via East since 1902.
9. A recent case in the Bijni sub-division where eviction notice was served to a few landless families settled for the past 20 years on *Char* 31 of the Manah river in Garabdara II village, highlighted the incidence of migration into the case study area even in recent years.
10. For an account of the effect of cash economy on a Bodo family in the 19th century, see Guha (2000: 50).
11. Field interviews, April–July 2005.
12. I borrow this term from Baruah (1999).
13. Full text available at http://www.neportal.org/NorthEastfiles/Assam/ActsOrdinances/index.asp. Last accessed: 27 December 2005.
14. For details see Goswami (2005b).
15. At times, there was hardly any differentiation made between the Asomiya and Koch-Rajbongshi. The Koch and Rajbongshi are Hindu converts from Bodo, Mech and allied 'tribal' communities. They are often defined as 'detribalised'. In many cases they have taken up Asomiya surnames and have for long identified

themselves with the mainstream. It is only in postcolonial attempts at political resurgence—on the ascendant in recent years—that there is an attempt to map a distinct identity for themselves and a demand for recognition as a scheduled tribe under the Indian constitution, a demand much opposed by other communities recognized as 'tribal', including the Bodos.

16. ABSU 1987.
17. Marwaris are a trading community from Rajasthan in India, and for long with absolute control over much of Assam economy.
18. Informant: Ex-Superintendent of Police posted in Kokrajhar during the Bodo agitation. Field interview, April 2005.
19. See reports. For detailed discussion see Goswami (2005a).
20. Full text available at www.bodoland.org/committee.PDF. Last accessed: 13/9/05.
21. For instance, the Asomiya newspaper, *Boodhbar* with its championship of the polyethnic character of Assam, became a forum for exchange of ideas expressing such solidarity with the Bodo cause, as a close look at the contents of the paper in the years 1992–1993 will show.
22. Full text available at http://www.neportal.org/NorthEastfiles/Assam/Acts Ordinances/index.asp. Last accessed: 27 December 2005.
23. With the community now having assimilated to the extent that they can and do lay equal claims to all opportunities open to the 'ethnic' Asomiya, they now pose a threat not because of their 'otherness' but because of their ability to surmount it.
24. Field interviews, December 2005.
25. Field interviews, December 2005.
26. Field interviews, December 2005.
27. *Dewan*s and *matbar*s are influential and affluent people.
28. Field interviews, December 2005.
29. Despite the nomenclature, Sar-sapori Muslim, given to this community for their large scale habitation on riverbanks and flood plains, there are those who have never lived on riverine land. There is a sharp divide between the community on the basis of area of habitation. Those on *kayem* or permanent, non-riverine land have a higher standing, socially and culturally.
30. Full text available at http://www.neportal.org/North Eastfiles/Assam/Acts-Ordinances/index.asp. Last accessed: 27 December 2005.
31. Informant Sujit Baglary, Extra Assistant Commissioner, Relief and Rehabilitation, Kokrajhar District, December 2005.
32. Field interviews, December 2005.
33. Field interviews, December 2005.
34. Field interviews, December 2005.
35. Field interviews and observations, December 2005.
36. The Indira Awas Yojana is a state undertaking, the objective of which is to help construct dwelling units by members of scheduled communities and also non-scheduled community rural poor living below the poverty line.
37. Field interviews, December 2005.

38. Field interviews with victims, December 2005.
39. Full text available at www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/idpSurvey.nsf 227BE8ED85 528AC8C1256DC70036FBAF$file/Appeal+2003-+LWS-I.pdf. Last accessed: 27 December 2005.
40. The word *madrasah* in Arabic means school. About the *madrasah*, the online encyclopedia Wikipedia states: 'It is commonly understood that wherever the governments failed to provide general education to its common citizens, private religious establishments succeeded to take the lead to fill this gap and administer the educational system of the country according to their own principles. In this context, a *madrasah* herewith is refered as an Islamic school for the Muslims, just as a parochial school for the Catholics or the yeshiva for the orthodox Jews. Although these institutions are academically assigned to provide general education, they also feel obliged to teach their students about the fundamentals of their religion. In the case of a madrasah, Islam'. Details available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madrassa. Last accessed: 27 December 2005.
41. Personal interview, December 2005.

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13

The Displaced Reangs of Hailakandi District

Abdul Mannan Mazumdar and Bornali Bhattacharjee

The Barak Valley of Assam, comprising the three districts of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi of south Assam has provided shelter to many displaced persons from time to time. These mainly fall into two categories—the displaced from neighbouring Bangladesh who are often termed as 'refugees' and second, the displaced from other states of the North Eastern region. Refugees, as we know, are those who cross international borders once displaced and seek shelter in other countries.

Previously, most of the tribes were nomadic due to their agricultural practices of *jhum* (swidden) cultivation and they moved from one place to the other for better and fertile cultivable land. Prior to 1937, the Kuki-chin tribes were living together in the Indian subcontinent. In 1937, Chin Hills and upper Chindwin were separated from India and became a part of Burma. Again, when India was partitioned in 1947, Chittagong Hill Tracts, a predominantly tribal area, was transferred to East Pakistan and after the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, became a part of it. The tribes that are numerically small often align themselves with the larger neighbouring tribes (Sen 1992: 3–4).

As stated earlier, Barak Valley has provided shelter to many displaced persons and ethnic groups from time to time. In fact, in this Valley, there is a considerable tribal population representing various ethnic groups like the Reangs, the Tipras, the Mizos and others.

Most of these tribes fall within the category of IDPs as they were displaced from their lands like Mizoram and Tripura and were compelled to go to other states of this region. In this paper, an attempt has been made to reflect briefly on the displacement of a very small ethnic group, that is the Reangs from Mizoram, as a good number of Reangs took shelter in the Assam–Mizoram border in the southern-most part of Hailakandi district of Assam in 1997.

The displacement of the Reangs is mainly the result of the ethnic clash with the dominant Mizos in Mizoram. Reangs are recognized as a Scheduled Tribe of Mizoram. They comprise of a population of around 85,000 concentrated in 75 villages in the western part of Aizawl district and some villages of Lunglei and Chimtuipui districts of Mizoram. Their percentage of literacy was not even one per cent till 1998 and 80 per cent of them are daily wage earners. (Akhil Bharatiya Vanabasi Kalyan Ashram 1998: 3). Most of the Reangs follow their tribal indigenous faith, which is based on some sort of Hinduism, and some of them are converted to Christianity. On the other hand, the Mizos are by and large an educated and developed community accounting for about 550,000 people (one lakh = 100,000) (Ibid). They are Christians. Racially, the Reangs and the Mizos are different from each other. Mizos belong to the Mongolian race of Chinkuki group. On the other hand, the Reangs belong to the Bodo racial group and their dialect is akin to that of the Tripuris.

The Mizos maintain that 'Mizoram is for the Mizos' and not for the Reangs. The Mizos, backed by the Church and the militant Mizo Students Association (Mizo Zirlai Pawl) have threatened the Reangs that they should conform to the general cultural and religious standards followed in the state. They even demand the change of the names of their (Reangs') children to conform to the Mizo style of naming. This situation has been going on since the state of Mizoram was formed in 1987. The Reangs did not take too kindly to this and offended the Mizos by forming some associations to protect and promote their ethnic identity, language and culture. In fact, an identity awareness has emerged in the minds of some youths of the Reang community.

In Mizoram, there are three districts, namely Aizawl, Lunglei and Chimtuipui. Under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India,

Mizoram has three district councils. These are the Chakma District Council, the Lai District Council and the Mara District Council under Chimtuipui administrative district. The Sixth Schedule spells out the concept of self-management in different spheres for the autonomous district councils. The district council can safeguard the customs, traditions and so on to protect the interests of the Scheduled Tribes living within the jurisdiction of autonomous district councils. There is no autonomous district council explicitly safeguarding the interests of Reangs of Mizoram (Bhattacharjee 2001: 64).

So in order to protect, develop and uplift the Reangs, the Bru (Reang) National Union (BNU) was formed in 1994. At a meeting held on 23 and 24 September 1997 at Suipuilui village of Mamit sub-division of Aizawl, it was demanded by the Reangs that an autonomous district council be set up to protect their cultural identity. They also demanded the reservation of three seats for them in the State Assembly. This infuriated the chauvinistic sections of the Mizos who felt that the Reangs are not only occupying their areas but are also trying to extend their domination (Ibid.: 66). The majority Mizos—particularly their student wings—answered the Reangs' assertion by murder, physical violence, torching their houses, destroying their religious places and looting their ancestral homes. At that critical juncture, they had no other alternative but to take shelter in Hailakandi district of Assam and Kanchanpur sub-division of Tripura.

According to the official reports of the district administration of Hailakandi, many groups of displaced Reangs arrived at Hailakandi across the Assam–Mizoram border on 13 October 1997. Their number was 2,475.[1] It was observed that their condition was pathetic and most of them were suffering from malaria and other epidemic diseases. There was no immediate relief distribution by the government. Many of them died due to starvation. The relief was received only as late as July 1998. After that, the supply of rice and salt was discontinued and the Reangs had to fend for themselves for their survival. They depended on nearby forests while eking out a living for themselves.

On the other hand, the district administration of Hailakandi had requested the Mizoram government to take back the Reangs

from Hailakandi district and also to provide relief materials for them. But the Deputy Commissioner of Aizawl did not respond at all and there was no serious step taken from the side of the Government of Mizoram to take back the displaced Reangs and to provide relief to them. The District Administration of Hailakandi also did not encourage the displaced Reangs to stay put in the district as it would mean the destruction of the forest areas.[2]

Besides this, the groups of Mizo youth accompanied by armed Mizo policemen came down to the nearest Assam village—Gutghuti where the Reangs had taken shelter. Six women who had migrated to Assam were tortured by the miscreants on 28 November 1997 (Bhattacharjee 2001: 80). The Mizos even demanded that all the forest villages of southern-most part of Hilakandi district of Assam form part of Mizoram. Under such miserable conditions, most of them left Hailakandi district and moved towards Kanchanpur subdivision of Tripura. Still some Reangs are living in the remaining huts of southern Hailakandi towards the Assam–Mizoram border and they are not willing to return to their homes as they think that the situation in Mizoram does not permit them to cross over there. Since they live in remote villages beyond the gaze of the administration, and the authorities have little knowledge about their living, they are not getting even the basic amenities of life. The local Reangs of this district are sympathetic towards them and are ready to fight for their cause for getting justice.[3] Now they are attracting little attention of the media, NGOs as well as international agencies.

The problems faced by the Reangs might be acute but it is not impossible to solve them. In fact, the Reangs lack political power to establish a ring of security around themselves. Ethnic, religious, political and cultural domination by the majority Mizos coupled with the lack of economic opportunities are responsible for the present travails faced by the Reangs.

The state of Mizoram where the Reangs lived for long, must seek the solution within the state itself. The compositeness of a state is universal and it is to be respected. In fact, the Reang issue should be taken as the problem of an unprivileged group and it deserves due consideration from the Central Government. The Government of India and the State Government of Mizoram should create suitable

conditions while providing adequate security to the Reangs. The Government of Mizoram should also create a sense of confidence in the minds of the Reang people so that they can return to their home villages in Mizoram. In fact, the demand of the Reang people at present is the return to their villages but ultimately the issue is linked to their political emancipation. Besides, the NGOs and human rights activists should spread the messages of the displaced Reangs to national and international platforms so that any further displacement may be contained in an effective manner by the government which is under pressure from distinct quarters.

NOTES

1. Records of the Hailakandi district administration.
2. Interviews with the local residents.
3. Interview with R.C. Malakar, Circle Officer, Katlicherra, Hailakandi.

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Section III
Manipur

14

Kuki-Naga Conflict and its Impact on the Zeliangrong People

K. Gailangam

In this paper, an attempt will be made to present in the form of a statistical report the loss of lives, homesteads and property, destruction of villages and so on, particularly amongst the Zeliangrong people, as a result of ethnic conflict that broke out between the Nagas and the Kukis of Manipur during the period 1992–98. This should not give us the impression that the clashes resulted in the victimization of only the Zeliangrongs. The ethnic clashes, to state the obvious, also had their impact on many other communities as well, which remain beyond the limited scope of this paper.

During the ethnic clash, about 163 persons belonging to the Zeliangrong community were reportedly killed, out of which 41 were females. Among them, a child of six months and a man of 78 years were included. The child belonged to Thongleng Akutpa village, and the old man was from Luangkho village, both from Tamenglong district of Manipur. Details of casualties may be seen in Table 14.1.

A year-wise breakup of casualties suggests that out of this total number of persons killed, 35 persons were killed in 1993; 60 persons in 1994; 22 persons in 1995; three persons in 1996; 30 persons in 1997; eight persons in 1998 and eight persons as late as 2000.

Table 14.1 Age-wise Breakup of Zeliangrong Casualties

S. No.	*Age/Years*	*No. of persons killed*
1.	10 years and below	16 persons
2.	30 years and below	63 persons
3.	50 years and below	62 persons
4.	70 years and below	20 persons
5.	80 years and below	2 persons
Total		163 persons

Note: Statistical data used are taken from 'List of Zeliangrong Victims killed during Naga-Kuki ethnic violence in Manipur' prepared by the Zeliangrong Union (Assam, Manipur and Nagaland).

The persons killed belonged to the following villages: Tunglong, Penjang, Lamdan, Naorem, Tingpui, Longsai, Makeng, Sengai, Longmai, Rangjan Longmai (Noney), Muktian, Khonglong, Duithanjang, Wainem, Sanabut of Tamenlong district, Puichi (Oktan), Tajeikaiphun (Kekru), Tamenglong H/Qs, Pongringlong, Kadi, Lamlaba, Makui Part 1, Chenikon, Jeinu (Natok), Makui Part II, Khumji (Lukhambi), Makui Part III, Thonglang Akupta, Luangkao, Nungba, Kanlong (Tupul), Talok, Alingsan, Awangkul (Longchum), Thingkara, Ijeilong, Laimanai (Langol), Phungcham of Ukhrul district, Tamlok, Moidanpok, Mukti Khullen, Kunphung, Longlei (Nungleiband), Rangtiang, Dailong, Changdailong, Katiang, Tungje (Assam), N-gam (Nagaland), Longpai, Duigailong, Bungram, Katang, Tamei, Rangkiakkulong, Tama, Rengpang, Namgaijang Khoupum and many other villages in Senapati and Churachandpur districts of Manipur. Besides the killings, many of the Zeliangrong villages were attacked, burnt down, uprooted and deserted during the ethnic clashes. During the period under review, about 8,280 persons belonging to 28 villages were affected and about 1,336 houses were either burnt or uprooted. Some of the villages destroyed include: Sempat Naga village, Tubung, Sanji, Nungsai, Pungsan Khullen, Mukti Khullen, Kekru Naga, Longlei (Nunglaiband), Katiang, Longpai, Kaimai, Rengkiakkulong, in Tamenglong district; Sedu Koireng, (Tunglong Part II), Kumbi Haotak in Bishnepur district; Sandai (Tunglong-III), Sadumon Samba (Tunglong-I), Ichum Kabui (Tumta), Wapong (Talamlong), Tapon-I, Tapon-II, Makui-II, Thangal Surung, Tokpa Tunglong, Thanamba (Pengjang), Natok (Jeinu), Khonglong-I, Khonglong-II, Wainem, Kongsakkhul, Leikhampokpi (Sekmai), Nungang (Chongphun) in Senapati district;

Laimanai (Tingpui), Ngarian (Rangtiang), Gailingjang, Sadu Khoiroi, Lamdan, Chaiba (Chalungkhou), Dimduanlong, Chingmai Kabui (Pungsanmai), Tokpa (Muktian) in Churachandpur district of Manipur.

Beyond the boundaries of the state of Manipur, many of the villages are reported to have been destroyed by the attacks, affecting in the process hundreds of Zeliangrong people, particularly those living in North Cachar Hills of Assam and Peren sub-division of Nagaland. In North Cachar Hills alone, 25 Zeliangrong houses were destroyed affecting the lives of as many as 114 people, and in Peren sub-division 42 Zelingrong houses were destroyed affecting 182 people in 1994. It is nevertheless difficult, if not impossible to ascertain the exact number of persons being killed or injured and also the property losses, particularly in a situation of extreme political turbulence. However, a rough idea can be given. Table 14.2 indicates that about 40 villages and 1,279 houses were destroyed affecting about 9,696 people during the clashes between the tribes mentioned above.

Table 14.2 Number of Affected Villages, Persons and Homesteads etc.

S. No.	*Name of the district*	*No. of villages*	*No. of houses*	*No. of persons*	*Nature of destruction*	
					Villages uprooted/ deserted	*Villages attacked/ burnt down*
1.	Tamenglong	12	457	3,080	4	8
2.	C. C. Pur	9	314	1,559	9	–
3.	Senapati	17	487	3,230	6	11
4.	Bishnepur	2	21	156	2	–
	Total	40	1,279	9,696	21	19

Note: Statistical data used are taken from 'List of Zeliangrong Victims killed during Naga-Kuki ethnic violence in Manipur' prepared by the Zeliangrong Union (Assam, Manipur and Nagaland).

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that during the ethnic violence, destruction of properties and loss of lives are not only for the Zeliangrong people but also for the other tribes as well. However, the facts and figures of other communities could not be included in this paper for we have not been able to collect information and data on them.

15

A Study of Ethnic Conflicts in the Hills, 1992–93

Ksh. Bimola Devi

Whenever there is any mention of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Manipur, the ethnic conflicts in the hills particularly since the middle of 1992 always come to our mind. These conflicts, as we all know resulted in the displacement of a large number of persons, including women and children. The period between 1992 and 1993 is usually described as the dark period in the social history of Manipur. This paper proposes to study the ethnic conflicts in the hill areas of Manipur during the above mentioned period on the basis of the data and information available in such published materials as newspapers, journals and documents of relevant political organizations.

There are 29 listed Scheduled Tribes in Manipur. They are broadly categorized into two groups: (*a*) the Naga group; and (*b*) the Kuki group. Some of the prominent groups among the Nagas are the Thangkhuls, Maos, Kabuis, Ngameis, Marings, Anals, Koms, Chirus and Chothes. The major groups among the Kukis are—Thadous, Paites, Gangtes, Vaipheis, Paites, Hmars, Khongsais and Sitlous. The Nagas form the major group in three districts of the hills namely, Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong, and one district namely, Churachandpur is overwhelmingly dominated by the Kuki group. The fifth district—Chandel—is inhabited evenly by both the Kukis and the Nagas.

Consistent with the overall increase in the population of Manipur, the population of both the Nagas and the Kukis is also on the increase since 1881. According to the 1881 census, the population of the Nagas was 59,908 and that of the Kukis was 25,384 (Singh 1994: 16). There was no major conflict between the two ethnic groups during the reign of the Kings, the British period (1891–1947) or the post-independence period (1947–91). But from the middle of 1992, conflicts between the two groups took an ugly turn and, within a short span of time, it led to wanton killings and kidnappings, burning and destruction of houses. A large number of people belonging to both these two groups were displaced and had to undergo untold sufferings and hardships.

ORIGINS OF THE CONFLICT

The conflict between the Nagas and the Kukis had its reported origins at Moreh town of the Chandel district bordering Myanmar. It is inhabited by both the Nagas and the Kukis and a large number of businessmen and traders from outside Manipur. It is the booming trade centre lying between Manipur in India and Tamu in Myanmar.

On 3 June 1992, two Kukis namely, Oukholet alias Oupu Haokip and Haokhopan Haokip, both residents of Moreh ward no. 3 were reportedly kidnapped by the armed Nagas while going to S. Mongyang village. Oukholet was killed but Haokhopan escaped. The conflict between the two groups spread like wildfire from this incident to other hill districts of Manipur including the valley. Killing and burning of houses became the common practice and the means of taking revenge on each other.

In the next seven months, that is from 3 June 1992 to 31 December 1993, Manipur hills witnessed the worst ever orgy of killings, burning of houses and destruction of private and public property, resulting in the displacement of a large number of persons. According to one estimate, as many as 336 persons were killed during the period (Singh 1994: 26). A classification of human casualties in terms of their ethnic origins reads as follows: 272 Kukis, 62 Nagas and 2 Koms.

The injured persons altogether numbered 145 (of them 76 were Kukis and 69 were Nagas). The number of houses burnt stood at 3,569 (of which 2,115 belong to the Kukis, 1,376 to the Nagas, 54 to the Koms, 16 to the Aimols and 8 to the Nepalis). Tamenglong bore the brunt of these conflicts in terms of human casualties. As many as 131 persons were killed and 978 houses were burnt in the district. The most unfortunate happening took place on 13 September 1993 when 87 villagers of Zoupi and Yanglengphai were stabbed to death. Another incident took place on 21 September in Tamenglong where 13 children were burnt alive. Table 15.1 gives the figures district-wise.

Table 15.1 District-wise Figure of Children Burnt Alive in Tamenglong

S. No.	*Name of the district*	*No. of persons killed*	*No. of persons injured*	*No. of houses burnt*
1.	Tamenglong	131	10	717
2.	Senapati	111	87	978
3.	Chandel	44	28	978
4.	Ukhrul	32	14	443
5.	Churachandpur	18	6	548

Source: Singh, 1994.

In Bishnepur district, 8 Naga houses were burnt, 40 women were killed and 44 children were killed in 1992–93. The injured persons were: 111 men, 25 women and nine children. These were the main factors responsible for the displacement of large number of persons in the hill areas of Manipur.

CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

The urge for protection and assertion of ethnic identity in the process of ascension to political power was the main cause of conflict between the two groups. Each ethnic group harboured an attitude of challenge towards the other group in areas predominantly inhabited by them. We may examine some of the press releases by the different organizations representing these two ethnic groups. The Naga Students Federation (NSF) in a press release claimed that the Kuki National Army (KNA) forcibly collected a huge amount of money on 30 May 1992 from four Maring Naga villages—Satong, Waksu, Phaison and

Chaktong, in the Chandel district (*The Freedom* 3 July 1993). These villages are located along the Indo-Myanmar border. An amount of 30,000 Kyats (Myanmarese currency) were also extorted by the said army. There was a shootout between National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) and KNA near Bongjang village—about 7–8 km from Moreh on 3 June 1992. The Kuki Students Organization (KSF) called a Moreh *bandh* (strike) on 4 May 1992. That very night, the Kukis allegedly asked the Nagas to leave Moreh town within 24 hours or face dire consequences. On the other hand, the Publicity Wing of the Kuki Defence Force (KDF) in a press release alleged that since the inception of the NSCN in 1989, the Nagaland tax had been imposed on every Kuki who resided in the hill districts of Manipur. After having paid them for more than four years, the NSCN still claimed that the Kukis had to pay their dues, which they allegedly incurred between 1947 and 1960. Other taxes like road tax, house tax and land tax were also imposed (*The Freedom* 26 September 1993). The Kuki Defence Force in responding to the published speech of Rajya Sabha MP W. Kulabidhu said 'the present violence in Manipur is caused by the illegal; and forcible collection by NSCN what it claims as the land tax at gun point from the hill people of Manipur without any fixed rate' (*The Freedom* 2 September 1993). The Peasant and Labour Society, a non-government organization in a press statement said that 'there may not be any involvement of NSCN demanding sovereignty and Kuki National Army demanding homeland' but suspected that 'there is a political group creating the conflict for political ends' (*Huiyen Lanpao* 19 May 1993). It may be noted that the Nagas treat the Kukis as encroachers and the Kukis after their settlement for over 200 years asserted that they had a right to their habitat. House tax, it seems, was levied by both the Nagas and the Kukis. The Nagas demand for constituting the Naga inhabited areas into a political personality and the Kukis too press the demand for the formation of a Kuki homeland.

PEACE INITIATIVE

There were many peace initiatives during the period under review especially in 1993. A Peace Forum was formed in Bishnepur district

consisting of the Tribals, the Meiteis and the Meitei Pangal. A Peace Committee consisting of the representatives of all political parties organized meetings at Lamlong, Kongba, Chairenkhong, Top Khongnangkhong, Thambalkhong and Mayang Imphal (*Simanta Patrika* 14 May 1993). Organizations representing different ethnic groups like: the Kuki Students Organization (KSO), Lamkang Students Union (LSU), Civil Rights Defence Council (CRDC) and Lamkang National Council (LNC) formed a Peace Committee and organized a meeting in Imphal on 24 May 1993 making an appeal to the members of the two communities to return to their respective villages (*Poknapham* 25 May 1993). A peace rally was organized on 5 June by the Yaingangpokpi Peace Committee. The International Sri Krishna Consciousness Society (ISKCON) also organized a peace rally on 10 August 1993. In order to restore peace and communal harmony, a peace rally was organized by artistes and art lovers of Manipur. A peace meeting was organized with the initiative of Deputy Chief Minister M. Rishang on 8 June in sensitive Litan of Ukhrul district where the Kukis and the Nagas are dwelling in large numbers (*The Freedom* 8 June 1993).

The then Chief Minister R. K. Dorendra convened an emergency meeting of the tribal ministers on 11 August 1993 and made an appeal for peace to both the ethnic groups (*The Freedom* 8 June 1993). The Goodwill Mission representing five states of North East India (with the name of Council of Baptist Churches) made an appeal to shun all acts of violence, wanton killing of innocent people, burning of villages and destroying of properties; to restrain from revengeful and retaliatory activities; to come to a roundtable conference to diffuse the tensions; to contain the spread of rumours; to restore normalcy and to make sincere and honest efforts to create a sense of confidence, tolerance and security in the minds of the public and to restore peace and harmony in the state (*The Freedom* 26 September 1993).

RELIEF MEASURES

Relief camps were established at Moirang and Phubala. In a press release, the Zeliangrong Relief Committee, Imphal, appealed to donate 3 per cent of the total emoluments of the Government

employees or Rs 10 per house in case of unemployed for the displaced persons (*Manipur Mail* 3 December 1993). Relief camps were organized at Maklan, Lamdan and Thenjang under the supervision of the Zeliangrong Relief Committee. Relief centres for the displaced Naga and Kuki persons were also established in different parts of Konthoujam Constituency like Koireng, Natok, Keithelmandi, Marajing Part-I to name a few (*Huiyen Lanpao* 8 October 1993). Villagers and voluntary organizations also organized relief camps at Ningthoukhong, Nachou, Phubala, Shamusiphai, Thinungei, Thaningkhul, Edumkom, Nungshai and Chiren in Bishnupur district (*Huiyen Lanpao* 30 October 1993). In Imphal, relief camps were established at Lamdeng, Shagaithel, Konthoujam, Kangchup, Hidakshungba, Mahabali, Hiyangthang, Luwangshangbam, Senjam and Heikrujam. The number of displaced persons in the relief camps up to October 1993 was: 15,289 in Senapati district, 29,841 in Imphal and 1,310 in Bishnepur (Ibid). The amount of money spent up to the month of October was Rs 5 million from the Kalamitiz Relief Fund and four million from the Tribal Welfare Development, Government of India (Ibid). The Government of Manipur also sanctioned Rs 860,000 to be paid as ex-gratia to the bereaved families of victims of ethnic violence (*The Freedom* 27 June1993). In addition, blankets and other essential commodities were distributed to the displaced persons by the government. Relief was also provided by other voluntary organizations.

The displaced persons—both the Kukis and the Nagas—suffered a lot due to the ethnic conflict in the hill areas of Manipur. Let us hope that such things do not happen in future.

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16

IDPs of Manipur Hills

Koijam Shethajit

In the recent past, the hills of Manipur had experienced a series of clashes between two major tribal groups of the state (Nagas and Kukis). Various cases of arson, killing, threat and counter-threat that were part of these clashes led to large-scale exodus of persons from their original homes. This has its serious implications for the population dynamics of the state.

The magnitude of the clashes rapidly spiralled from stray incidents to mass involvement almost reaching the scale of a civil war. In the process many innocent lives were lost and villages razed to ashes. Numerous persons fled their homes and took shelter in secure places. The capital, Imphal has absorbed a part of the ravage while large villages at the fringes of the city have become larger. Some of the towns witnessed an increase in their population by leaps and bounds. Slowly but definitely a trend of grouping of people belonging to the same or similar tribes in specific areas became the reality. Inter-ethnic clashes in the North East seem to have changed the urban ecology of Manipur. Nowadays, the number of heavy clashes has receded significantly but the change effected in the pattern of human habitation is not reversed. A large number of displaced persons are facing untold sufferings silently without any visible help either from the State Government or any of the NGOs. The victims fight their daily battle of survival on their own.

In such a backdrop, the present effort is to create an awareness of the issues involved and examine the possible political fallout of

these clashes and to assess their consequences. In order to have an understanding of the population pattern in the state, we may briefly examine the Census Report of 1971 (when the clashes were not so apparent) represented in Table 16.1.

Manipur is a land of Meitei people and many other tribes living together and contributing to the state's history for a long time. The tribes of Manipur—numbering more than 30—inhabit the hills while the Meiteis predominantly inhabit the plains. As the census report shows, there is no particular district in Manipur which is exclusively inhabited by any specific group as all tribal groups—large or small—are distributed sparsely in all parts of the hills. Every district for that matter has a heterogeneous population. The Nagas and the Kukis inhabit all the hill districts of Manipur. The Kuki and Naga villagers are usually found as neighbours to each other. Besides, these two groups, there are also many other smaller tribes seeking to protect their separate identities.

As for the roots of the crisis, the causes are not very clearly known. The people who become casualties in the clashes are always confused as to why they were targeted. Some sort of hidden agenda seemed to prevail over the issues that came to the forefront. But as the story goes, members of an underground group reportedly attacked a village or somebody in the field first. This provoked the other group to retaliate. Thus the fight continued until both groups were apparently tired out. But when the situation came back to normal, the underground groups started the whole cycle over again.

There has not been any study so far—whether by the government or by any other group—pointing to what might have led to the carnage. A white paper on the issue would certainly have helped the people of Manipur. One of the very oft-cited and yet unfounded (and therefore dubious) reasons is the theory of 'ethnic cleansing'. Newspapers—both national and local—have many a time come up with this theory. This term implies that one of the Naga underground groups is trying to expel all the other non-Naga population out of some designated districts or areas, so as to obtain an all-Naga territory. The alleged objective is to have greater bargaining power with the Central Government and at the same time to create a solid population base for the Naga tribes, which might, in the future, help the rebels in forming a greater Nagaland.

Table 16.1 Tribe-wise Population in Manipur by Districts

S. No.	*Name of tribes*	*Name of the District*						*Manipur Total*
		Manipur (North)	*Manipur (West)*	*Manipur (South)*	*Manipur (East)*	*Manipur (Central)*	*Tengnoupal*	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.	Aimol	–	–	–	–	3	833	836
2.	Anal	158	–	262	3	516	5,731	6,670
3.	Angami	11	–	–	49	10	–	70
4.	Chiru	1,617	804	332	–	29	3	2,785
5.	Chothe	381	–	181	134	45	1,164	1,905
6.	Gangte	312	1,185	3,918	99	441	352	6,307
7.	Hmar	128	333	20,703	115	1,747	286	23,312
8.	Kabui	3,015	27,093	1,670	8	8,468	3	40,257
9.	Kacha Naga	4,657	7,853	414	1	101	–	13,026
10.	Koirao	1,620	–	–	–	–	–	1,620
11.	Koireng	367	–	–	–	91	–	458
12.	Kom	1,759	382	2,722	3	1,214	470	6,550
13.	Lamgang	4	3	–	–	29	2,586	2,622
14.	Any Mizo Lushai tribe	415	2	4,789	142	261	1,874	7,483

15.	Maram	4,519	1	–	–	19	–	4,539
16.	Maring	1,292	–	78	91	345	8,019	9,825
17.	Mao	32,974	–	8	18	364	15	33,379
18.	Monsang	–	–	–	–	16	914	930
19.	Mayon	7	–	–	–	187	1,166	1,360
20.	Paite	461	7	20,964	432	1,904	987	24,755
21.	Purum	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
22.	Ralte	–	–	154	–	–	–	154
23.	Sema	1	–	2	–	–	–	3
24.	Simte	25	16	4,092	1	38	5	4,177
25.	Salhte	–	–	–	–	3	–	3
26.	Thangkhul	4,980	10	60	51,101	1,408	292	57,851
27.	Thadou	21,096	5,567	14,320	7,301	3,517	8,154	59,955
28.	Vaiphei	2,665	500	8,648	175	294	65	12,347
29.	Zow	2	–	8,427	13	63	1,555	10,060
30.	Unspecified	240	240	240	240	251	16	1,227
	Total:- All Tribes	82,706	43,996	91,984	59,926	21,364	34,490	3,34,466

Source: Census, 1971.

But the theory appears absurd and ambiguous. In the first place, the Naga tribes are not of one group only but comprise various groups. Second, the Naga movement is described as a 'national movement' and not an ethnic movement. And, therefore, the relationship between ethnic cleansing and Naga movement is rather incomprehensible. Even if the theory has some element of truth in it, there are various factors, which would be detrimental to the objective. As most of the districts are of mixed nature, any district inhabited only by one group is quite unthinkable. It would be a gigantic effort and one may presume, an impossible task. But if that impossible task is undertaken, it will have its consequences for the society. The best way therefore, would be to stop resorting to any kind of violent means and live together in an atmosphere of friendship.

The problems faced by the internally displaced persons is manifold. Most importantly, when one is displaced from his usual surroundings, he is unlikely to get work easily. Vast agricultural lands suddenly turn into killing fields and one cannot go there to harvest. Economically these people are reduced to paupers. The most affected groups are the women and children. The recent case of unlawful adoption of many children by a foreign couple and their subsequent rescue by the government agencies only speak of the disturbing scenario. Now that the clashes have subsided, the government still has not given due importance to the issue of displaced persons. However, it is a fact that thousands of people are still fighting a losing battle.

To conclude, it may be suggested that various tasks are to be taken up by the government, the NGOs and the people at large. The internally displaced persons must be properly identified and immediate measures to rehabilitate them should be taken up without wasting time. The government should extend adequate security to the affected persons. Along with the short-term measures, it should also take up long-term plans so that such incidents do not recur. One such effort would be to develop the district headquarters into cosmopolitan centres, where different groups of people are allowed to settle and take part in the development of the area. This becomes a reality only by strengthening the communication facilities specially the roads. Without proper communication facilities people would not like to settle in the district headquarters,

where the facilities of modern livelihood are lacking. In this regard, help may come from North Eastern Council (NEC), the Central Government and international bodies. However, all these measures would not help in bringing peace in the state until the people themselves realize the futility of waging war against each other. For this, an appropriate education policy should be framed and pursued with all earnestness. A person who knows the true political and socio-economic situation of the state would hardly quarrel with a person of another group.

17

A Case Study of the May 1993 Riot Victims of Purum Pangaltabi

S. Mangi Singh

On 3 May 1993, there was an outbreak of violent riots in some parts of the valley which led to the killing of about 100 innocent persons including men, women and children, within a short span of three to four days. The violent ethnic clashes as far as we know started in the hills around May 1992 (*Poknapham* 6 June 1993: 1). One hardly expected an eruption of violent riots in the valley. Ironically enough, the riots broke out one day after the then Chief Minister of the state, R.K. Dorendra Singh, led a peace and harmony rally from Imphal. The rally was supposed to continue for seven days along the National Highway (NH) 39 (*Huiyen Lanpao* 3 May 1993: 1). Apparently, People's Republican Army (PRA), then a newly formed armed group in the valley, reached a deal with one Md. Adon/Adonbi[1] of Lilong Haoreibi Mayai Leikai for arms purchase in April. However, when the arms were not delivered as per the agreement, three PRA men went to Adonbi's place to collect their money. As Adonbi failed to return the money, the PRA men started walking away with a Yamaha motorcycle which was there in Adonbi's place. At this, Adonbi started shouting that the Yamaha motorcycle had been snatched. In response to his cry, the people nearby began attacking the PRA men (*Huiyen Lanpao* 3 May 1993: 1). The three PRA were beaten up and arrested by

the security guards of Md. Hellaluddin, the then Fishery Minister, who was there inspecting the repairing of roads in the area.[2] The next day, in retaliation, some PRA men spread communal and wild rumours about Meiteis being seriously beaten up by the Muslims.[3] Within no time, with rumours of wildest proportions flying around, the atmosphere became very tense by mid-day and this provided the ground for the communal riots of May 1993 in the valley of Manipur. Once the first spark was set off, it spread to a number of Muslim-inhabited areas of the valley. One source gives the overall estimate of riot victims and their houses shown in Table 17.1.[4]

Table 17.1 Record of the Affected Victims of May Riot 1993

S. No.	*Name of village*	*No. of houses*	*Total population*
1.	Samushang Shantipur (Paobitek) village	53	310
2.	Kiyamgei village	7	47
3.	Sunulok (Thamnapokpi) village	38	238
4.	Kambongbut village	11	71
5.	Purum Pangaltabi village	60	325
6.	Lamphel Khuningthek village	18	103
7.	Haotal village (Thangjam Khunnou)	6	36
8.	Sugunu village	1	4
9.	Kanglatongbi village	2	10
Total	9 Villages	196 Households	1,144 Population

THE VILLAGE PURUM PANGALTABI

Purum Pangaltabi, a Pangal (or Manipuri Muslim) village, is about 19 Km north of Imphal. Purum is an area inhabited by Pangals, Nepalis and the Kom tribe. Purum Pangaltabi is the area inhabited by the Pangals. It means Pangal inhabited area of Purum (Pangal = Manipuri Muslim; and tabi = area inhabited by). It has been there since 1928.[5] It is within the Inner Parliamentary Constituency and the Khundrakpam Assembly Constituency of Manipur. It falls within the jurisdiction of the Uyumpok Gram Panchayat and lies along the right bank of the Iril river. It is bounded by the Uyumpok village

in the east and west; by the Girjang Kuki village in the south; and by the Purum Kom village in the west. The Iril river surrounds the north and eastern sides of the village. The entire area is said to be about 30 acres.[6] It had 60 households on the eve of the riots with a total population of 325.[7] The main occupation of the people is cultivation, rickshaw pulling and growing of seasonal crops mainly on the right bank of the Iril river.[8]

The Riot

It was sometime between 10.30 and 11 p.m. of 4 May 1993 that the village was attacked by rioters. All the households of the village including the mosque were set on fire, and by about 2.30 a.m. of 5 May, the entire village was burnt to ashes.[9] Md. Ibo, simply, but most eloquently said: 'shit nanna chak-ee'?[10] However, one report says that the fire brigade was able to save about five to six houses from being completely gutted by fire (*Huiyen Lanpao* 6 May 1993: 1). The food grains, livestocks and even the vegetables in the kitchen gardens were completely destroyed. One person, Md. Kamaruddin (of about 60 years) died and another person, Md. Ito (about 62 years) was injured.[11] There could have been a far greater numbers of casualties. But the villagers had prior information that violent riots might take place in their area because of the tense situation resulting from wild rumours and riots of the previous day. Besides, on 4 May itself, Sri K. Binoy Singh, the local MLA and also the IFCD Minister of the state, had come to the village and warned the villagers about the tense situation asking them to be on alert about any possible outbreak of violence.[12]

However, when the people requested him to station some security personnel in the village for their safety, the minister regretted his inability to do so as most of the police personnel were rushed to Lilong and other sites where riots had already taken place or situations were very tense.[13] Being left on their own to defend themselves, the villagers that night hid at the back of the village graveyard, which was at the farthest end of the village, shrouded with trees and heavy bushes.[14] The next day, they were escorted out by security men and were taken to Khabeisoi where an emergency relief camp was set up for them.

Khabeisoi is a place about 6 Kms from Imphal and also a Muslim locality. The people of Pangaltabi stayed there for two days depending mainly on the hospitality of the surrounding Muslims and also on some relief material sent by the government. Then, they were shifted to T.G. Higher Secondary School where the government had already set up a relief camp. They stayed there till the government closed down the camp after the 9 May (*Poknapham* 10 May 1993: 1). After that, they came back again to Khabeisoi and started living in temporary plastic tents.

AFTERMATH OF THE RIOT

It took about one month for the first villager to return to the devastated village. Md. Ibo, who was the first one to return, said that he had returned the next month itself.[15] It may be noted here that a meeting was organized by the Iril Valley Youth Council about 10 days after the riots. The organizers went to Khabeisoi where the victims had already returned again from the T. G. Higher Secondary School relief camp. They invited some of the important persons from amongst the victims to come and attend the meeting. About 10 of the victims including three to four women came to the meeting. The people attending the meeting appealed to the victims to return to their village and impressed upon them about their resolve to guarantee the victims' safety. They also reiterated their willingness to help the victims in building their houses.[16] Other victims started returning during the period from August to February the following year.[17] These were also the months when they could find some work in the fields for a living.[18] However, not all have returned even now. At present there are 28 households in Pangaltabi with a total population of 183.[19] Many families are still staying at Khabeisoi. Some have moved out to another place called Khomidok Hannaching Khunnou. At present there are 10 households at Khabeisoi with a total population of 68[20] and Khomidok Hannaching Khunnou has 16 households with a total population of 94.[21] Some of them have also gone to other places. For instance, four households have gone to Kshetrigao, two to Yairipok, one each to Shora and Keirao.[22]

PRESENT PROBLEMS

Even after about eight years of the riot, majority of the victims of Purum Pangaltabi are yet to come to terms with a semblance of normal life. The problems they are facing at present because of the riot will be obvious even to a casual observer. One can start with the people of Pangaltabi village at present. Those families who returned in 1993 itself started their lives by building temporary plastic tents or huts in the outskirts of the village adjacent to the main road. It is also from there that an inroad to the village has been made. They started their new lives by working in the fields of other people around August because it is a time when extra hands are required in the fields. The helping hands, which they received initially from the surrounding people, were negligible and have already been withdrawn fast. They made formal intimations to the concerned village authorities with request for financial and material help.[23] They also sent a formal intimation to the concerned relief commissioner and District Commissioner (DC) but no response in the form of financial or material help has come from them.[24] The village still does not have electricity or drinking water supply. The inroad from the main road to the interiors of the village along the right bank of the Iril river is in an utterly bad shape at present because of the erosion of the bank over the years. No vehicle can proceed beyond, maybe, half a kilometre into the interior of the village. Yet this was the road through which central services would travel up to the village graveyard prior to the outbreak of the riot. There is hardly one household with a full tin-roof. Only recently, the villagers have been able to build their own mosque with difficulty. In view of the poor economic condition of the households, it is very difficult for them to go on a fund-drive, even for building a mosque. Even today the mosque cannot afford a loudspeaker. Many households still have to buy rice in December/ January each year.[25] Normally these are the months when even the poor farmers have at least some reserves of paddy for themselves for unlike the cities, in the villages agricultural employment is mostly seasonal and people hardly have any scope for working to earn on a day to day basis. A cluster of about 10 very small houses in very bad shape with thatched roof, having no proper walls, doors or windows still exists there. The children of this group of houses had no full-sleeve

shirts, forget about warm clothes, when I saw them outside their houses in the freezing evenings of December and January. They also have obvious signs of undernourishment.

Then there are sixteen families in the Khomidok Hannaching Khunnou. Twelve of these families form a cluster while the remaining four are at a distance. The entire cluster of twelve families live on a plot of land barely about one-fourth of an acre. They came there around March/April 1995.[26] Prior to that they were at Khabeisoi camp for about two years along with other riot victims from Pangaltabi. They sold their land in Pangaltabi and bought a small piece of land jointly along with one family from Hatta (not a riot victim) and distributed the land amongst themselves.[27] This hardly leaves any room for kitchen gardening and sanitary privacy. The path leading to this area has no sign of stone pebbles. As such, one can easily imagine the situation during the rainy season. They have to depend on the ponds of the surrounding villages for water. They do not have a mosque of their own. Most of the men there are rickshaw pullers. But except for one person who got a rickshaw while in Khabeisoi, none of them has a rickshaw of his own.[28] The women already restricted by their own cultural traditions, and also because of their isolated location, have difficulty looking for work. Their children have to travel far up to Heingang to reach their school. None of them received any housing loan.[29] Nor did they get any ration card while staying at Khabeisoi. Now they are under Khurai Assembly Constituency but have yet to get a ration card for rice and for kerosene.[30] Some farmers are also there. But none of them has any land except those who have rented land from others. Apart from visiting them during elections with a view to get their votes, none of the politicians, MLAs or ministers has come there to enquire about their well-being, and with an intention to help them in their efforts to rebuild their lives.[31] The same can be said of the high-ranking administrators or bureaucrats. In that cluster of 12 families there is only one girl who is in class VII. The others are in junior classes.

The situation is even worse in Khabeisoi. At present there are 10 households. They have been there for almost eight years. Most of them are not thinking of going back to Pangaltabi. There are many reasons for this. For one, many do not have their own land to build their houses there. Second, they find it very difficult to earn their

living, as they do not have their own fields there. Those fields, which they have rented for agriculture, have been taken away by the owners and have been rented out to others following their displacement because of the riots. Besides, as Khabeisoi is nearer to the city, it is easier for them to find work either as rickshaw pullers or manual workers or coolies if they continue living there.[32]

While they are allowed to use the present land they occupy, the villagers are not giving the land to them for its upkeep. In fact, they have come to the present site after vacating a low-lying field just near the main road where they had originally camped. Those who have a little plot at Pangaltabi are now contemplating to sell their land and buy some at Khabeisoi. But they cannot raise enough money as their land at far away Pangaltabi is otherwise very cheap while land at Khabeisoi is very costly.[33] Their present houses are all too small and in very bad shape. They also have hardly any land for kitchen gardening which could have helped them in growing necessary vegetables for the family. They have no drinking water or electricity connection. They also do not have a pond of their own. At present they depend on two public ponds. When the water there dries up in the hot summer, they have to travel up to Chingarel or Iril river both of which are about 2–3 km away from their site. All the households do not have ration cards for rice, though they have ration cards for kerosene.[34] None of them have received any housing loan or any other type of loan to start a viable business for earning a livelihood. They also do not have a mosque of their own. The local MLA and other politicians also have not done anything towards creating a lasting rehabilitation for them.

One can mention here about the problems of the people in Khabeisoi and Khomidok Hannaching Khunnou. It is true that normally they share cordial relations with the surrounding Muslim localities. They have social interaction with them and their women marry into families in neighbouring localities. However, there is still a stigma attached to them. They remain like some sort of refugees in the locality. They are made to feel like outsiders because of the mere fact that they are from Purum.[35] There was a time when the people of the nearby areas closed their doors on their face. Those were the early years of their displacement when they were suffering from destitution and had to depend on the hospitality of

others for the basic needs of life. Even now, they have to go to the mosque of nearby localities for prayers. Even more heart rending is the fact that they have to lay their dead in the burial grounds of others. When quarrels occasionally break out, the possibility of exhuming those dead bodies is not ruled out.[36] During the dry season, it is difficult for the women to go and fetch water from the private ponds of the nearby families. The latter do not want to share their water when it becomes scarce. The fact that they are still not getting ration cards for rice, sugar, kerosene (except for the houses in Khabeisoi) also means that they cannot get even small quantities of these basic things at government subsidized rates.

REHABILITATION MEASURES OF THE GOVERNMENT

The way they are living at present is clear proof of the fact that the government has not done anything significant for permanent rehabilitation of the people. From time to time, it has made some promises to help the people in their rehabilitation efforts. But most of them have remained mere promises. For example, even though they have been promised five bundles of corrugated galvanized iron (C.G.I) sheets to help them construct their houses, more than half of the households are still not getting these sheets. Many have already given up hopes of getting it. They are not being given these sheets because corrupt government officials want some bribes from them.[37] Many of those who received it have sold them so they could use the money to meet their more urgent needs. Not even a single household has received a housing loan so far in spite of repeated requests from the people. Earlier there was a scheme under which the people could have applied for financial assistance of Rs 12,000. While one half of the amount was to be given as a grant in the form of a rickshaw, the remaining sum of Rs 6,000 was to be given as loan. But again some middlemen wanted their cut of the money. Not only that, those who would pursue the matter on their behalf also wanted their own share. When the people, in their hurry to get the assistance, requested the authorities to allow them to have the rickshaws without the loan, they were refused.[38] In the process, many of the people were discouraged and disheartened. Ironically enough,

some victims who have returned to their village Pangaltabi are being pressed for repayment of crop loans taken by them from a Gram Panchayat level multi-purpose co-operative society before the riot.[39] This is happening in spite of the fact that the crop loans were taken before the riot and that the entire village was burnt to ashes during the riot. The people have requested the government to waive the loan on humanitarian ground. But, so far the people have not received any positive response from the government.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is no denying the fact that the root cause of the violent May 1993 riot was that of interpersonal conflicts and quarrels. It was reportedly between a gang of armed smugglers and an underground organization newly formed by a few persons. It must be noted that the Meitei localities on both sides of the NH 39 before it reaches Lilong are very sensitive insurgency prone areas. Soon tensions started mounting up in and around Imphal, mainly on the national highway between Imphal main market and Lilong—a stretch of about 13–14 km. Within no time the rumours took on alarming proportions with the result that processions and roadblocks caused disruption of traffic on this road. Some vehicles were actually burnt. Equally crucial was the fact that there is a college in the Lilong Haorieibi area. It is by the eastern bank of the Turel Ahanbi river with some hills located nearby. The tension in the atmosphere was almost palpable when rumours started doing rounds that Meitei college students, including girls, were all taken hostage, and that many Meiteis were killed with their bodies thrown into the river.

There is every possibility that the PRA and some of its sympathizers considered the beating up of the three PRA men and their subsequent arrest as a serious affront and challenge to them, and started spreading communal and wild rumours. These rumours were exaggerated within no time which ultimately led to the flaring up of the riot.

The riot was not the result of a religious conflict between the Meitei Hindus and Manipuri Muslims. It is true that both the communities did not inter-dine earlier and that even now inter-marriage between the two is exceptionally rare. If the Muslims continued with their

close social system and isolationism, the Meitei Hindus are also influenced by ideas of purity, pollution and untouchability as a result of their conversion to Hinduism. But these things have not resulted in mutual hostility, animosity or hatred between the two. In fact, their relationship was, and is still, characterized by respect and tolerance for each other's religious beliefs and socio-cultural practices, and they continue to co-exist peacefully, if somewhat in isolation from each other. The armed smugglers were outright anti-socials or criminals and they should not be identified with any particular religious group. All the other insurgent organizations in the valley were also unanimous in condemning all those (including the PRA) who were responsible for the ugly riots. In fact, their condemnation was so vehement that the PRA disappeared altogether from the scene within no time. Since then, no one has ever heard of them again. There was absolutely no communal tension or clash between the two communities prior to 1993; and the May 1993 riot was an isolated happening and it still remains so.

The episode must also be a reminder to all responsible individuals and groups inside the society about the great damage baseless rumours can inflict upon communal harmony in society and should, therefore, make us more careful about paying attention to rumours. The episode also clearly exposed the lack of preparedness on the part of the law and order enforcing agencies of the state.

The present condition of the May riot victims of Pangaltabi also clearly shows the government's failure to implement really effective policies and programmes for their permanent and meaningful rehabilitation even after about eight years of the riot. This is absolutely unfair. The promises they made to the people have to be translated into reality. The government should also know how an insensitive bureaucracy and administration could add insult to injury. The victims' present plight also exposes the insensitivity of the MLAs, politicians and other public leaders towards the problems of the displaced people. This has led to the erosion of faith of the people in political leaders. The political leaders as well as the bureaucracy have to be duly sensitized to the miseries of these displaced people.

The ghost of the past still haunts the May riot victims of Pangaltabi irrespective of the place they may reside in now. It reminds them of dreams that have been shattered; a life of peace, security and promise that has gone with the wind. While initial shock, anguish, fright

and bewilderment will take time to subside, they are being further burdened by the daunting task of rebuilding their lives from virtually nothing. They and their miserable plight have all but faded from the memory of the government, NGOs, student organizations and the general public. Many are also left alone to nurse their wounds silently.

Finally, I remember Md. Ithem, now in Khomidok Hannaching Khunnou. I was about to leave the place after meeting the people there late in the evening. Perhaps I got a little carried away after being with them for about one hour or so. I started giving vent to my emotions by talking aloud to myself as well as to others nearby about all the dreams that must have been devastated because of the riot. I remember mentioning in particular those children who must have given up their studies; about the dreams of those parents who cherished the hope of seeing their children growing up well-educated, and with prospects of their becoming doctors or lawyers. Now all abandoned! Then I caught his eyes, and stopped. I saw a married man, a father in fact, but only 20, becoming suddenly forlorn, vulnerable and innocent like a child. The eyes reflected the deep stirrings, which he must have just felt inside his being. Was I imagining? I know I was not. The lost childhood! The abandoned dreams! The stark reality of the present! All were there. Overwhelmed, yet unknown to himself, he turned and went back to his small and simple house. At least I did not see the usual bitterness which always makes me feel guilty. In his face, I saw the triumph of the inherent goodness of man over evil.

APPENDIX

Interviews

1. Md. Dillip, volunteer (33 years) Green Cross, interviewed on 16 December 2000 and 15 January 2001.
2. Md. Ibo alias Abdul Ghani (60 years) Ex President, Local Voluntary Club interviewed on 16 December 2000.
3. Md. Pukhrimayum Khamba (55 years), interviewed on 5 January 2001.
4. Pukhrimayum Ongbi Madina (45 years), interviewed on 5 January 2001.

5. A.C. Shidam, Ex-General Secretary, Iril Valley Youth Council, interviewed on 9 January 2001.
6. Md. Hasim (32 years), interviewed on 9 January 2001.
7. Kamaruddin (55 years), interviewed in 9 January 2001.
8. Md. Maniruddin (30 years), interviewed on 9 January 2001.
9. Md. Basir (27 years), interviewed on 9 January 2001.
10. Md. Manirkhan (35 years), interviewed on 29 January 2001.
11. Md. Ithem (20 years), interviewed on 29 January 2001.
12. Md. Hayakhan (20 years), interviewed on 29 January 2001.
13. Md. Mamei (25 years), interviewed on 29 January 2001.
14. Md. Rahaman Khan (22 years) interviewed on 29 January 2001.
15. Harkun Begum(27 years), interviewed on 29 January 2001.
16. Md. Ayazuddin (17 years), interviewed on 29 January 2001.
17. Md. Abo (23 years), interviewed on 29 January 2001.

NOTES

1. Shyamananda, SP, Imphal, in a press meeting held at Imphal on 6 May 1993.
2. Message of Minister of Fisheries, Md. Hellaluddin, appeared in *Poknapham*, 8 May 1993, p.1.
3. Mr Shyamananda, SP, Imphal, op. cit.
4. 'Record of the Affected Victims of May Riot 1993', enclosure to a letter to the Programme Organizer, Green Cross, from Md. Dilip, Volunteer, Green Cross.
5. Statements for the Victims of May Riot 1993 (Purum Pangaltabi), checked by Md. Dilip, Youth leader, Purum Pangaltabi.
6. Md. Abdul Ghani, Ex-President, Local Voluntary Club, interviewed on 11 December 2000.
7. 'Record of the Affected Victims of May Riot 1993', op. cit.
8. Statements for the Victims of May Riot 1993 (Purum Pangaltabi), op. cit.
9. Ibid.
10. Md. Abdul Ghani, op. cit.
11. Statements for the Victims of May Riot, 1993 (Purum Pangaltabi), op. cit.
12. Md. Hasim, a victim of the riot, still living in Khabeisoi, interviewed on 9 January 2000.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Md. Abdul Ghani, op. cit.
16. Abujam Shidam, Ex-General Secretary, Iril Valley Youth Council, interviewed on 9 January 2000.
17. Md. Abdul Ghani, op. cit.
18. Ibid.

19. Survey conducted in the village on 16 December 2000 with the help of local volunteers.
20. Survey conducted in the village on 11 December 2000 with the help of local volunteers.
21. Survey conducted in the village on 29 December 2000.
22. Pukhrimayum Ongbi Madina, interviewed on 5 January 2001.
23. Md. Dillip, op. cit.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Md. Manirkhan, of Khomidok Hannaching Khunnou, interviewed on 29 January 2001.
27. Md. Hayakhan, of Khomidok Hannaching Khunnou, interviewed on 29 January 2001.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Harkun Begum, of Khomidok Hannaching Khunnou, interviewed on 29 January 2001.
31. People of Khomidok Hannaching, met on 29 January 2001.
32. Md. Hasim, of Khabeisoi, op.cit.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Pukhrimayum Ongbi Madina, op.cit.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Victims now living in Khabeisoi and Khomidok Khunou.
39. Md. Hasim, op.cit.

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Yengsinbidraba 1993 gee May Riot Victim (Relief Camper) Shingna Meeyamda Wakatchaba.

18

A Note on the Internally Displaced Persons

R. K. Ranjan Singh

Historically, the people of Manipur experienced a series of difficulties caused by the internal displacement of persons that took place in their state, particularly in some of the hilly tribal areas. For example, if someone tries to read the toposheet or other village maps, one will find that some village names have the suffix *machet* which in Manipuri stands for 'fraction' or 'part'. The Hill villages where the 'Chieftain' system still prevails, the chief and his younger brother are always involved in conflicts. As a result, the Chief would oust his brother from the village. Hence, the brother gets displaced from the village with his family and supporters. However, ultimately the displaced brother and his followers form a village with the same name that the earlier village bore suffixing the word *machet* to it.

In the recent past, the Tarao of Leishokching (Chandel District) witnessed such a conflict between the brother and the chief. The brother along with his followers had to migrate from the Leishokching area. The brother and his group moved towards the Sanakeithel of Ukhrul District, came under the influence of another ethnic tribe and converted to their system of beliefs. After settling at Sanakeithel, the brother of Leishokching Tarao and his people, not being allowed to use their customary dresses and rites, were unable to adapt to the new environment. Ultimately, through the mediation

by a philanthropic organization called Manipur Cultural Integration Conference (MCIC), headed by Maharaj Kumar Priya Brata (Sanayaima) Singh, the conflict was resolved.

Second, an entire village in the valley, called Chairen, located along the wetlands complex of the eastern side of the river Manipur has been displaced by man-made disaster. The village Chairen was famous for its pottery products and traditionally preserved dry fishes (*Leirou Leeba*) in the state of Manipur. The village economy was sustainable till the commissioning of the Ithai-Barrage of Loktak Hydro-electric Project. After commissioning of the project, the level of the water of the eastern wetland areas was raised by the impounding water of the Ithai Barrage. As a result, the villagers were displaced and tried to settle at the hill slope of the Sugnu area. It is a fact that the homestead land and their right to environmental protection has been usurped by the so-called modern development projects. The Chairen evidence is only the tip of the iceberg of the whole man-made disaster caused by the Loktak project. Many self-sustaining village economies were ruined and the individuals deprived of their right to environment and right to live in the area. There is a similar threat in the Upper Barak Basin by the proposed Tipaimukh High Dam. As per the investigation report, more than 40,000 indigenous people will be displaced by the implementation of the above mentioned project.

Finally, displacement also takes place because of the armed and inter-tribal conflicts particularly in the Hill Districts of Manipur. This conflict that started in 1992 seems to have subsided in the year 1997. During these five years of ethnic rioting, more than 2,000 innocent men, women and children lost their lives. About 6,000 houses were razed to ashes. As a result, more than 50,000 people were internally displaced from their places of habitual residence.

Now it is time that we review the present condition of the IDPs in Manipur and the policy makers need to focus on how we can save Manipur from the scourge of displacement.

19

IDPs and the Problems of their Education

L. LEIREN SINGH

This paper confines itself to an analysis of the impact of internal displacement in the area of education in Manipur. The conflict between the Meiteis and Manipuri Muslims in the month of May 1994, between the Nagas and the Kukis during 1994–98, the Kukis and the Paites in 1998 were the instances of how such conflicts produced large numbers of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in both the valley and hill areas of Manipur.

The immediate result was the closing down of all educational institutions for months together and turning some of the schools and colleges into temporary camps for the homeless and affected people. The students were deprived of their educational facilities and as such their valuable time was wasted for reasons beyond their control. Various scheduled examinations were postponed seriously affecting the academic calendar of the examining bodies. Sometimes, examination centres were shifted in order to avoid unwanted incidents. To cite some examples, undergraduate students of the troubled district of Chaurachandpur had to change their examination centres to either Imphal College or D.M. College causing great inconvenience to the students appearing for this examination through no fault of their own. Many of the candidates were forced to drop out from the examination. The general dropout rate of candidates increased enormously.

The problems of the IDPs of Manipur aggravated more because of the frequent *bandh*s, strikes and public curfews (prohibitory orders imposed mostly by the protest organizations on the public, imposed from time to time). They also caused serious dislocations in the various academic programmes taken up by the academic bodies and educational institutions in the state. The business establishments and their operations were also affected to a great extent by such dislocations causing untold misery to the common people of Manipur. An effective academic programme can be taken up only when there is an atmosphere of peace and proper understanding in the minds of the different sections of people living in the state of Manipur, not only for the present but also for all time to come. Hence, a proper understanding and resolution of conflicts through discussion, dialogue and exchange of views is essential. Peace education can play an effective role in this regard. We may conclude this paper by way of referring to some of the main planks of peace education in Manipur:

1. Teaching values like tolerance, and respect for others and practical ethics as a part of the regular curriculum.
2. Teaching children aspects of ethics and cultures other than that of their own groups.
3. Teaching all sections of the people the use of modern conflict resolution techniques both at interpersonal and intergroup levels.
4. Giving sophisticated leadership and guidance service available to all persons and groups who have been exploited and abused.
5. Strengthening the impact of co-existence by promoting the cooperation of parents and parents' organization.
6. Reiterating the peace-making knowledge, attitudes and skills several times in a personal learning career.
7. Making the mass media partners in conflict resolution.
8. Promoting peace by offering appropriate courses and workshops on a wide range of topics.

In concluding our discussion, it may be pointed out that peace education and conflict resolution will have to be started from home and slowly and gradually extended to the schools and community circles, and from there to the state and country as a whole. For solving the problems of internally displaced persons in the field of education in Manipur, the cooperation, coordination and sharing of experiences of all sections of the people of Manipur are essential. A work culture and professional ethics of the teachers and administrators should be inculcated by all possible means with a broader perspective of the overall development of the state. A concerted effort should be made by the political party in power in the state, with a political will to solve the problems of IDPs by using education as a tool to change attitudes of the people at all levels of society.

Section IV
Tripura

20

Internally Displaced Persons in Tripura: Past and Present

Mahadev Chakravarti

Ever since independence, India has been host to refugees from almost all over South Asia—Tibetans, Sri Lankans, Tamils, Myanmar Chins, Bangladeshi Chakmas and so on. We have a good number of research works on these refugees but the glaring problems of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have remained almost untouched and invisible for a long time. It is only in recent times that the problems of the victims of state policy, the development process and insurgency have been engaging the attention of the social scientists, academics and policy analysts.

DEFINITION OF REFUGEE AND IDP: QUESTION OF INTERNAL REFUGEE

According to International Law, a person is regarded as a 'refugee' when he has left the country of his residence of which he was a national owing to bitter relations between the state and himself due to some political events (Simpson 1939: 3–4; Vernat 1953: 3). The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and article 33(1) of the UN Convention on Refugees (1951) specifically states that:

> No contracting state shall expel or return a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

Regarding IDP also, the UN has given the following definition:

> Internally displaced persons are persons or group of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or place of habitual residence, in particular, as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violation of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border. (United Nations 1999: 6)

Thus, crossing an international border is an important distinction between refugees and IDPs. Moreover, the IDPs are not stateless persons and the nature of relations with the state varies from case to case. Although some scholars want to expand the definition of refugees to include all who have been displaced by natural or man-made disasters and the denial of food, water, land rights, etc.,[1] and some scholars want to coin the term 'internal refugees' still the attempt appears to be debatable.

The IDP today is a global phenomenon. Other than the process of development, the displacement question in our country also has assumed importance for a variety of reasons. It is difficult to estimate the real numbers of displaced Hindus and Muslims who fled from Jammu and Kashmir after 1990 to other parts of the country. Other than transborder population flow from Bangladesh, in the opinion of Ranabir Samaddar, displacement of millions influenced the psychology of postcoloniality, and the so-called 'numbers game' does not tell everything clearly (1999: 60). Speaking about the North East, the Shukla Commission mentions how 'this resource-rich region is truly a national asset' (Shukla et al. 1997: 8). Yet the question of IDPs is the most prominent in this region. It is not for nothing that out of Rs 1,348.15 crore (1 crore = 10,000,000) as demanded from the Shukla Commission by the Government of Tripura in 1997 as basic minimum construction cost, Rs 450.96 crores was earmarked only for housing for shelter-less persons.[2]

In fact, landlessness, homelessness and joblessness of the IDPs are the chronic problems.

MIGRATION AND THE QUESTION OF IDP

Migration is a law of civilization and many social scientists, particularly demographers, sociologists, economists and geographers have enriched our understanding about internal migration in India through the approaches and methodologies of their respective disciplines. The migration tables in the census reports of Tripura reflect on migration from rural to rural, rural to urban, urban to rural and urban to urban. The internal migration may be of various types: within the country, within the province, within the district, within the sub-division, etc. As there is no mention of the refugees or IDPs in the census reports of Tripura, it is difficult to point out the decadal variations of the IDPs. However, there are tables of in-migration and 'reasons for migration from last residence' in the census reports of 1991 (migration tables).[3] From Table 20.1 we may at least have some idea about voluntary migration and involuntary migration. Involuntary migration or forced displacements are equated with internal displacement. Although the three columns, that is (*iv*) 'Family moved', (*vi*) 'Natural calamities' (perhaps included for the first time in 1991 Census to include drought, flood etc.), and (*vii*) 'others' are not adequately explained in the 1991 Census of Tripura, still we may have an approximate idea of the IDPs from these figures. From Table 20.2, we get a picture of migrant workers by place of last residence.

Table 20.1 Tripura 1991: Migrants by Place of Last Residence and Reason for Migration (All Duration of Residence)

	Total migrants	*Employment*	*Business*	*Education*	*Family moved*	*Marriage*	*Natural calamities*	*Others*
Tripura		*(i)*	*(ii)*	*(iii)*	*(iv)*	*(v)*	*(vi)*	*(vii)*
Total	812,139	54,286	9,061	8,640	244,285	195,917	2,382	297,568
Rural	654,487	35,620	6,039	5,262	189,395	167,723	1,992	248,456
Urban	157,652	1,666	3,022	3,378	54,890	28,194	390	49,112

Source: Census of India 1991, Series 24–Tripura, Part VA & VB–D Series, Migration Tables, pp. 138–39, 206–07, 274–75.

Table 20.2 Tripura 1991: Migrant Workers by Place of Last Residence by Industrial Category

	Total migrant workers	*Cultivators*	*Agricultural labourers*	*Workers in household industries*	*Other workers*	*Total migrant workers other than i and ii*
Tripura		*(i)*	*(ii)*	*(iii)*	*(iv)*	*(v)*
Total	309,320	92,641	61,959	6,591	148,129	154,720
Rural	246,218	90,342	58,815	5,820	91,241	97,061
Urban	63,102	2,299	3,144	771	56,888	57,659

Source: Census of India 1991, Series 24–Tripura, Part VA and VB–D Series, Migration Tables, pp. 456–58, 504, 506.

HISTORY OF IDPs IN TRIPURA

Reang Unrest in 1942—43: State Repression and IDPs

The Reangs, the second largest tribe in Tripura, rose to revolt against the agents of the Maharaja of Tripura in 1942–43. But the movement was brutally suppressed by the forces of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya. The brutal torture prompted the panic-stricken Reangs to leave Amarpur and Udaipur in South Tripura—the centres of uprising—and to emigrate in thousands to North Tripura, particularly Dharmanagar division and also towards the Chittagong Hill Tracts (now in Bangladesh) and the Lushai Hills. Whereas in 1931 the Reangs had the highest concentration in South Tripura, the scenario changed after the uprising in the 1940s as seen in Table 20.3.

Thus we have the instance of repression-induced displacement in Tripura (among the Reangs) as early as the 1940s of the last century.[4]

Close on the heels of repatriation of Chakma refugees recently to their native land Bangladesh, the little state of Tripura has had to experience influx of a large number of Reangs (Brus) from Mizoram since October 1997. The Reangs took shelter in six relief camps sponsored by the Government in Kanchanpur sub-division of North

Tripura district and the official number (Government of Tripura, p. 47) stood at 35,995 of 6,952 families in January 1999. This is another glaring case of the IDPs in Tripura whose problems are yet to be solved; although these Reangs do not belong to the state of Tripura. The total Reang IDPs today from Mizoram to Tripura are equal to the total Reang population of Tripura in 1931. In this context we may see in Table 20.4 the growth of Reang population in Tripura since 1931 to 1991.

Table 20.3 Reang Population in Different Divisions of Tripura Before and After the Reang Unrest

Division/Sub-division	*1931 census*	*1961 census*
1. Sadar	15	44
2. Khowai	5,000	6,469
3. Kailashahar	11,218	6,283
4. Kamalpur	–	2,668
5. Dharmanagar	735	18,834
6. Sonamura	144	1
7. Udaipur	2,151	2,374
8. Amarpur	11,758	12,537
9. Belonia	4,653	7,341
10. Sabroom	207	46
Total Reangs in Tripura	35,881	56,597

Note: Data are compiled from the Census reports of 1931 and 1961.

Table 20.4 Tripura: Total Tribal Population and Reang Population Since 1931

Year (census)	*Total tribal population*	*Total reang population*
1931	192,249	35,881
1941	256,991	40,347
1951	237,953	48,471
1961	360,070	56,597
1971	450,544	64,722
1981	583,920	84,003
1991	853,345	....

Note: The data are compiled from the Census reports of 1931, 1941, 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991 respectively.

Based on the pre-agricultural level of technology, low level of literacy, etc., 75 tribal communities in India have been identified and

categorized as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG) and the Reangs of Tripura belong to PTG. As most of the Reangs are *jhumia*s, the plight of the *jhumia*s in today's world when *jhum* (slash and burn method of cultivation) is universally discarded for ecological and other reasons, needs no elaboration.[5] The Reangs have to experience displacement as they belong to PTG. Thus the question of the settlement and rehabilitaion of the *jhumia*s has become a burning issue in Tripura.

Development-induced IDPs: The Case of Dumbur Hydel Project

In our country, the colonial period had produced a vast segment of displaced people because of their policies. Most of the development projects were located in the most backward areas and populated by the most vulnerable sections of the society. The colonial masters denied majority of people their age-old and traditional access to natural resources. Vast contingents of rural and tribal population consisted of these IDPs at the time of independence and have continued to be so even after 60 years of independence. There are lots of examples of how the ruthless developmental projects have created jobless, voiceless, futureless and above all rootless people (*Human Development Report* 2000: 81) all over the country. Researchers (Fernandes and Thukral 1989) have shown how in India the development programmes have caused an aggregate displacement of more than 20 million people during roughly the six decades after independence, of which 75 per cent of the IDPs are yet to be rehabilitated. Tripura is no exception to this general picture.

There are lots of controversies regarding the justification of constructing the Dumbur Hydroelectric Power Project on the principal river of Tripura—the Gumti—which is formed by the confluence of two rivulets, the Raima and the Sarma. The project was sanctioned in 1967 and completed in 1976. True, hydropower is the cheapest source of power and it may have some distinctive advantages, but the amount of human suffering caused by this project for generating 8.60 MW of power has shocked a lot of people. An interdisciplinary research project entitled 'Integrated Watershed

Management of the Gumti River Valley' was undertaken by the scholars of Calcutta University Post–Graduate Centre, Agartala, in 1986–88. Table 20.5 shows how thousands of families were uprooted for this hydro project.

Table 20.5 Number of Ousted Families from the Dumbur Hydroelectric Project

Victims of development	*Jote occupiers*	*Khas occupiers*	*Total*
Tribal families	805	1,312	2,117
Non-tribal families	378	350	728
Total evicted families	1,183	1,662	2,845

Source: Dasgupta, 1992, p. 206.

The plight of the tribals displaced by the acquisition of land for the Dumbur project has made the upper catchment area, where the oustees live without adequate rehabilitation facilities, a centre of extremist activities as the insurgents cash in on the discontent of the Dumbur oustees. Thus the developmental project, which did not take into consideration the needs of the people at the grassroots level, not only caused displacement but also helped ultimately in the emergence of insurgency problems. Again, it was because of the insurgency that the problems of the IDPs in recent times became so acute. The genesis of the insurgency problem in Tripura is to be understood in the context of the problems of the IDPs. We shall see how insurgency in Tripura propelled terror and counter-terror and caused displacement of a large number of both tribal and non-tribal people. Again, because of prolonged insurgency problem, the wheels of development in other sectors also halted and despite abundance of natural resources (like oil, gas, water and forest wealth), no outside investment has taken place. Thus the problems are compounded creating complex situations which are both causes and results of the IDPs.

Riot-related Displacement: The June Riot of 1980

The highest human tragedy in Tripura caused by the June riot of 1980 needs no description. Table 20.6 will indicate the sufferings of the tribal and non-tribal people.

Table 20.6 Tripura: Effects of the June Riot of 1980

1. Total population of Tripura in 1981 census	2,053,058
Tribal population of Tripura in 1981 census	583,920
2. Population affected–(Tribal)	144,549
(Non-tribal)	227,499
Total	372,048
3. Nos. of IDPs in relief camps	189,919
(out of which 1/5th were tribals)	
4. Total Nos. of relief camps	141
Tribal relief camps	45
5. Total Nos. of gutted houses	34,661
Tribal gutted houses	11,025
6. Loss of property	
(*i*) Tribal	Rs 44,353,127
(*ii*) Non-tribal	Rs 164,378,757
Total	Rs 209,163,014

Sources: Dinesh Singh Committee Report, 1980, GOI, New Delhi and Census of India 1981.

Other than the loss of over 1,300 lives, life itself became a torment to the IDPs belonging to both tribal and non-tribal communities. The Bengali refugees of the past were uprooted for the second time as IDPs. In some cases, the tribal and non-tribal victims of the June riot, despite being at the receiving end, had refused to be displaced. Thus, some sort of collective resistance against displacement had slowly begun.

Regarding the camp life of the IDPs, one can only say that those displaced persons were compelled to lead a dehumanized life in makeshift unhygienic relief camps, or in buildings or houses of educational institutions waiting for a suitable alternative. Michael M. Cernea in his model for population displacement and resettlement has already pointed out how landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, economic marginalization accompanied by social and psychological marginalization, increased morbidity, social insecurity and mortality due to psychosomatic diseases and diseases of poor hygiene (such as diarrhoea and dysentery), social disarticulation within the kinship system, etc., are accompanied with the camp life (Cernea 1999: 3659 ff). Tripura is no exception to this general rule. Most of the 141 camps which were opened during the June riot of 1980 were closed within

a year and the families that were unwilling to go back to their villages, partly because of remoteness or isolation of the villages and partly because of their traumatic sufferings and horrid memories, were allowed to move to transit camps or temporary structures near the places of their previous residence; the logic being that by shifting the families closer to their homes, the people would get psychologically better prepared. Apart from granting normal *khas* land and housing grants, about 50,000 IDPs, who were victims of the riot, were also allowed to take bamboo and other materials for rebuilding their houses near the transit camps. The main advantage of this scheme was that people could reconstruct their houses in new sites while staying at the same time in transit camps. Over 1,000 families who had lost one or more members of their families were provided with government jobs by relaxation of required qualifications. From the experience of the 1980 June riot, it became vividly clear to everyone that virtually nobody wanted to be displaced from his village (whatever the grim memories) because of the agrarian social structure based on the principle of reciprocity and because of a number of emotional links.

OFFICIAL LAWS AND DISPLACEMENT IN THE PAST AND PRESENT

We have already seen the interconnection between the so-called development process and displacement. Here we should point out that official laws indirectly create and complicate the problems of the IDPs, because in most cases the colonial model is followed in a postcolonial situation. The impact of the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980, or the National Forest Policy of 1988 or the National Forestry Action Programme (NFAP) 1999 on the forest people of Tripura may be studied in detail. Here it is sufficient to mention that to the tribal people, land and forests are not simply territories or geographical units, but something more, as these are inalienable rights according to customary practices. Those who were displaced from the 'reserved forests' could not go back to their old places

because of judicial restrictions. Similarly, in the case of land, it has been observed that a large number of *jhumia*s and poor tribal families are in occupation of *kha*s land for a long time without any legally valid occupancy documents. On the one hand, we have the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act 1993 which gives immense powers to the *Panchayat*s to function as units of self-government. The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) has been constituted under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and para 3 of the Sixth Schedule also provides that the District Council shall have power to make laws in respect of allotment, occupation, use or the setting apart of land. On the other hand, the Land Acquisition (Amendment) Bill 1998 aims at speeding up land acquisition anywhere in the country by vesting powers in the hands of the district collector (and not in the hands of the local self units) and thereby denying the displaced tribals or grassroots organizations any say either in the land acquisition or development process. The present Bill is in no way different from British India's Land Acquisition Act 1894 in regard to its basic philosophy. Thus we have two conflicting understandings of the ownership right of land which have helped make the displacement problem a complicated one.

Niraja Gopal Jayal has pointed out how in the Indian context three arguments are usually put forward in order to justify development-related displacement and the laws thereto: (*a*) 'the greatest good of the greatest number' theory; (*b*) the 'public purpose' theory; and (*c*) the so-called 'mainstream' theory (1998: 33–35). The 29th Report of the Commissioner for SC and ST (1990) questions fundamentally the assumption of land as an individual property as it ignores the social reality of tribal life with the community, and not the individual, being the basic social unit (Ibid.: 34). Thus there is a need to take cognizance of the traditional values and practices of tribal people before enacting any law regarding displacement or formulating schemes for their rehabilitation or development programmes. If we have a look at the *jhumia* rehabilitation schemes in Tripura since 1953 when the so-called pilot schemes were in operation, it is to be found that most of the approaches were of ad hoc nature without any clear-cut plan or goal. Hence, most

projects for the rehabilitation of the *jhumia*s or tribal IDPs failed to evoke any wide response from the people for whom it was meant; and naturally failed to deliver the intended results. In the past, the resettlement and rehabilitation schemes for tribal IDPs in Tripura used only the state apparatus (the legal-forest-revenue and police nexus) and generally treated the displaced as a law and order problem rather than as a part of a creative development process. That old attitude has changed in the meantime no doubt, but the problems of the IDPs still remained.

INSURGENCY-RELATED DISPLACEMENT IN TRIPURA

We have already mentioned how in recent times insurgency propelled unprecedented terror and counter-terror causing evictions of a huge number of people from their home. In some cases, the insurgents did not even spare those who took shelter in relief camps. They are insensitive to the sufferings of the IDPs. All four districts of Tripura are equally affected by the insurgency-related displacement problem. Table 20.7 will give an idea about the West Tripura district, the worst-affected district in this respect.

Table 20.7 West Tripura District: IDPs due to Insurgent Activities, January 1998 to March 2001

Total nos. of displaced families	**2,614**
Total nos. of displaced families (Non-tribal)	2,434
Total nos. of displaced families (Tribal)	180
Some affected areas:	
Khowai sub-division: 600 displaced families in Maharani, Durganagar, Rajnagar, Shatinagar, Champahaor, Trishabari, Chamaghat etc.	
Sadar sub-division: Jirania colony, Chakbasta, Champaknagar, Mohanpur, Urabari, Benkathal, Panchabati etc.	
Bishalgarh sub-division: Jampuijala, Takarjala, Pathalighat, Amtali, Kanchmala, Nabashantigaunj etc.	

Source: Daily Desher Katha, 2 June 2001, Agartala.

The wide dimension of insurgency-related displacement can easily be imagined from the above table of a particular district. As in the

case of the 1980 June riot, some relief camps are opened in such cases for a particular period and some NGOs also sometimes take the initiative of confidence-building. Again, some complaints are also being lodged against displacement in the interior hill areas caused by the anti-insurgency operations of the para-military forces. This problem is also no less important.

CONCLUSION

As the problem of the IDPs is of wide dimension, all effort must be taken to prevent further displacement. *The Human Development Report 2000* has recommended one policy instrument: an early warning system. In the words of the Report:

> The Forum for Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) is an independent consortium of inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations and academic institutions whose aim is to provide decision-makers with information and analyses for early warning of conflict and with options for early response. (p. 122)

To prevent insurgency-related displacement we may consider the need for such types of organization. The recommendations of the Shukla Commission for the North Eastern region in general, and for Tripura in particular, largely remain unimplemented till date. Hence, strong public opinion is needed for the early implementation of the Shukla Commission recommendations. Again, it is not through official measures alone, not through top-down official efforts only, that the magnitude of such a vast problem can be solved. Society is to be involved. 'We shall have to repent in this generation', to quote Martin Luther King Jr, 'not so much for the evil deeds of the wicked people, but for the appalling silence of the good people.' Finally, in the context of Tripura, we should point out that displacing an existing group without its consent—both tribal and non-tribal—either through legal measures or by the application of force would be both ahistorical and immoral as there is no alternative today but a shared homeland.

NOTES

1. Bose and Manchanda (1997). Bose holds that the definition of refugees should be extended to cover also in-migrants and 'economic refugees' displaced by the capital-intensive development policies of modern times.
2. Shukla et al., 1997, Basic Minimum Services, Table 1, p. 9A.
3. Census of India, 1991, *Series 24.* If the three reasons for migration, that is 'family moved', 'natural calamities' and 'others' as shown in 1991 census of Tripura are taken together, the figures stand at 544,235 out of total migrants of 812,139.
4. The figures of 1961 census are cited here as the inaccurate census reports of 1951 about the Reangs fail to indicate the number and the migration process. Up to 1941, the population of Kamalpur was enumerated with Kailashahar subdivision.
5. Unlike what is otherwise claimed by the author, empirical researches on the correlation between slash-and-burn cultivation characteristic of the tribal communities to ecology and environment point to no decisive conclusion in this respect and are to say the least, yet unclear—Editor.

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21

Development and Displacement: A Case Study of the IDPs

Satyadeo Poddar

Whatever the present paper argues will have its reference to the case study of some internally displaced families of Champaknagar in Tripura and therefore cannot be simplistically extended to the North East as a whole.

Tripura is a state of India, which has been bearing the brunt of both refugees and displaced people. The threat of Kuki raids and the Reang revolt had been causing displacement in the history of Tripura since its princely days. Post-independent Tripura tells us the story of mixed influx of refugees, IDPs and economic migrants. The sizeable increase in the population of Tripura from 645,707 in 1951 to 1,142,005 in 1961 testifies to the flow of refugees from other areas (Census of India 1991). The decrease of the percentage of rural population from 89.01 per cent in 1981 to 84.74 per cent in 1991 accounts for the extent of internal migration or growing pace of urbanization (Ibid).

As per the Administrative Reports of Tripura 1903–04, the total number of Reang students enrolled in the Boys' School of Udaipur was 18 and it was six in the school of Belonia (Chakravarti 1992: 134) and the figure was not found crossing 50 in any year up to 1942–43 (Poddar 1995: 15–21). The post-independence Tripura witnesses a growing feeling of marginalization among the indigenous people of the state due to changes in its demography. Their self-sufficient

economy started feeling a threat with the rapid immigration of population from across the state borders, thus increasing pressure on their society and economy.

The administrative structure of the state divides the entire state between Autonomous District Council (ADC) area and general area. Champaknagar falls in the periphery of Autonomous District Council which is 26 km away from Agartala, the capital of the state. In fact, it is within a Sadar division, which has 12 villages having 12 panchayats. Out of 12 panchayats, 10 panchayats are dominated by Scheduled Tribes and two panchayats are by the Bengalis. (Sunil Debnath and Omesh Pal are at present *Gram Pradhan* of the Bengali-dominated villages.) Champaknagar is very important from commercial point of view as it provides a market outlet for the ADC. Thus the majority of the tribal population surrounds three parts of Champaknagar bazaar.

There are six places around Champaknagar, for example, Mohram Sadarpara, Shantinagar, Padamohanpara, Monkhraipara, Haribaktapara and West Chintapara, from where some Bengali families have been displaced forcibly by an unidentified extremist group. These internally displaced people settled themselves in and around Champaknagar area. From our interview, it was found that displaced families from Shantinagar were settled sporadically in the areas of Rani Bazzar, Kamalasagar and Champaknagar. Around 128 families from Padamohanpara were settled in Champaknagar proper. Displaced persons from Haribaktapara were settled in Viswamanipara. Sixteen families, which came from Padamohanpara were settled near Kamalanagar. Haradhan Path[1] links this village to Khamarbari, which is about 1 km north of Champaknagar. The researcher got an opportunity to visit the places from where people were forced to leave their homes and where they had settled. We got the information by way of conducting our interviews. The help extended by Satya Debnath (41 years old) deserves special praise. He is a devoted Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) worker of Champaknagar Sadar Division. Along with office workers, he supplied all information and escorted us to the spot for our survey work taking all the risks. The spot that now looks deserted was around 5 km from the northern part of Champaknagar bazaar.

The company of Narayana Debnath throughout our survey work from Agartala to Champaknagar left us with so many memorable stories.

OBSERVATIONS

- The list of 16 families of Kamalanagar shows that they bear surnames of either Das or Debnath, and all are Bengalis. Jagdish Das (60 year old) and Chandramohan Das narrated that they have been displaced thrice in their life span. Due to torture, they had to first leave Dhanipati Khala village at Moradnagar (in the Comilla District of present Bangladesh) in 1968. They first settled at Padamohanpara in the northern part of Champaknagar, which has been shown to us separately. The June 1980 event displaced them once again to Moharam Sadarpara and successive events in the months of January, February and April 1999 forced the families of Moharam Sadarpara to leave and they are at present residing at Kamalanagar. Their journey from the then East Pakistan to Kamalanagar is a story of metamorphosis of refugeehood into the status of IDPs. They still fear further displacement as frequent attacks and capture of their cattle and livestock have become one of their day-to-day concerns and no security of their life and property is available even after so many years of constant movement.
- The IDPs, settled in Khamarbari, Haradhan colony, as is reflected through snaps show that the houses are well built and connected with a main road (linking Agartala with Assam). It is a *pucca* (metalled) road. Electricity is available for each home though in some houses loop lines were seen. Both males and females work as day labourers. The government has supplied help and assistance, which has changed their lifestyle. They cultivate trees around their house, the wood of which is sold at high prices. This is their profitable business. They also continue with settled cultivation. The government has provided irrigation facilities and consequently those areas

have developed as a fertile land for vegetables and paddy. A middle school runs in that locality. One co-operative society was also found near that village. If a comparison is made of their life at present with their situation in Padamohanpara, it is clear that displacement has brought major development in the society of these IDPs. The respondents expressed their opinion that they are very happy with the present situation. When asked about their political alignment, they openly expressed belief in the Left government. The development, which was witnessed in Haradhanpara, was not to be found in other areas accommodating the IDPs of the state. That displacement leads development is true only for the IDPs of Champakanagar and it cannot be generalized.

- Day to day activities in the state are much more politicized. With persistent organizational activities, the Left parties have been successful in making their base in the tribal zones of the state, which is easily evident from their representation in the State Legislative Assembly and Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Councils (T TAADC) in different periods of time. The replacement of the governance in the ADC areas by another regional party (Indigenous People's Front of Tripura or IPF T) marks a demise of the Left party in the ADC. Hence this leaves scope for conflicts between the two parties. The strategic location of Champaknagar is important for both the political groups—which is a gateway to the vast tribal terrain. This is one of the reasons that these areas are still attacked time and again. The available data kept at the CPM party office of Champaknagar bazaar says that from 1994 onwards the extremists killed around 45 people. Out of 45 people, 27 were Bengalis and rest belonged to Scheduled Tribes. They also narrated that 75 per cent of those who lost their lives were supporters of the Left party and the rest were those of Congress and others. In the whole process, 25 extremists have also been killed. The above analysis indicates that there is a clear relation between displacement, development and party politics.

NOTE

1. British Debnath, son of Sri Bhushan Mohan Debnath, 48 years old, narrated that Haradhan Saha was a devoted worker of CPM in Chamaknagar. He was very popular among the people. One day he was taken away from Chamapaknagar by an unidentified extremist to Moharam Sadarpara and was shot dead brutally in front of the villagers on 11 October 1996. Along with Haradhan Saha, three more persons—taking tea with him—were killed at Chamapaknagar bazaar. In memory of Haradhan Saha, the road has been named as Haradhan Path and the area is called Haradhan colony.

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22

Gumti Hydel Project and the Displaced Persons

Malaya Banerjee

The Gumti Hydel Project began as a dream of the State of Tripura, but ended as a nightmare. Nearly 15,000 people paid for it with everything they ever had—their homes, their cultivable lands, their traditions, their histories. Besides, there were also environmental costs involved in the project. It submerged several hectares of forests (full of trees like Sal, teak, banyan, dense and good-quality bamboos among others), destroyed the eco-system, disturbed the natural flow of rivers, endangered wildlife by upsetting bio-diversity, and inundated about 24,000 acres of prime agricultural land. The Project altered the ecology of the entire river basin. Today there are more flood prone areas in Tripura than ever before.

The river Gumti, the most important river of the state, runs almost through the centre of hilly Tripura. It is formed by the confluence of two small rivers—the Rhima and the Sarma. The Dumbur Fall (Tirthamukh), a spectacular cascading fall, has been formed in its course. The Gumti Hydel Project is the first of its kind in Tripura with its catchment area of about 547 sq km. The catchment is bounded by Longtrai range of hills in the east, Atharamura range in the west, the lower hills in the north connecting the two ranges, and by the low hills along Tripura-Bangladesh border in the south.

It was decided in 1960 that a medium-range project would be constructed over the river Gumti for the supply of irrigation water in

the Nutan Bazar area. Subsequently, that medium irrigation project was converted into a huge hydel project keeping in view the rising demand for electricity in the state. After completion of the dam in 1974, the entire area from Gandacherra in the north to Ratannagar in the east was flooded with water. It was in 1967 that the scheme for setting up of a small hydropower station of 10 MW capacity on the river Gumti was prepared. Then in 1968 the Government of India accorded permission for setting up the hydropower station. During the fourth five year plan (1969–74) the construction of 10 MW(2 × 5 MW) Gumti mini hydropower station began. This power station had subsequently been upgraded during the sixth plan by an addition of another 1 × 5 MW capacity to it. During the fourth plan construction of 66 KV. transmission line between Gumti and Agartala via Udaipur had also commenced. With the commissioning of the first two units of 5 MW capacity, each hydro generating set on the river in June 1976 and then in February 1977, the state for the first time achieved self-sufficiency in power generation (Government of Tripura 1997: 75–76). But about the actual supply of power, Tripura is still in a dark corner. Power continues to be purchased by Tripura from Assam and Manipur.

As a pre-requisite for sanctioning the Project, clearance from different departments was obtained and schemes for rehabilitation of the persons to be displaced by the project were also approved by the Government of India. But unfortunately, all such schemes and their implementation have not yielded any encouraging result—one major cause being that the displaced people who were expected to be at the centre stage, have been more or less sidelined.

This development project displaced at least 15,000 tribal and non-tribal persons in Tripura. The money spent on assistance hardly benefited the affected ones. It is true that some programmes for their development were considered in phases.[1] Did the dam prove helpful to the people belonging to the area? In 1974, Nripen Chakraborty, the then leader of the opposition Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Tripura Legislative Assembly, described the plight of the displaced persons in the following words: 'Nothing is audible at this moment except the wailing of Rhima. The Government and the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) is keeping absolute silence on this

matter. Only the melancholic tune of the wailing of fifteen thousand displaced persons can be heard'.[2]

The Dumbur Project displaced about 15,000 people and submerged 20 sq km of fertile cultivable lands notwithstanding the demands for alternative rehabilitation of the displaced persons since the inception of the project. Their demand resonated over and over again in Tripura whether in the assembly sessions or in the newspapers (Deb 1996: 143). In 1975, Ananta Hari Jamatia, an MLA, said in the assembly that:

> if the problems of Dumbur oustees were discussed in this budget session it would have good results. Those people have sacrificed their everything [*sic*] for the development of the state as a whole. The responsibility of looking after the well being of those displaced persons was entrusted to Tribal Welfare Department. Among the oustees there were also people from other communities beside the tribals. But that Department had no authority to pay even Re 1. That Department had no fund of its own until diverted from the Revenue Department and P.W.D.[3]

M.L.A. Bulu Kuki said that in 1965, a good number of tribal people were evicted from Rhima-Sarma by applying the Foreigners' Act.[4] Abhiram Debbarma, a member of the assembly, challenged the Council of Ministers and said that the oustees rehabilitated in Rhima-Sarma Ganganagar camps were leading a very pathetic life.[5] Another member of the Tripura Legislative Assembly Hansadhwaj Dewan said: 'Mogs, Chakmas, Garos were not rehabilitated considering them landless as they were not covered under Maharajas' Tribal Reserve Order ("Pancha Tripuri"), and accordingly they were not allotted any land.'[6] But it may be pointed out that 80 per cent of the total tribal population in the state is covered with the provision of Tribal Reserve Order of the Maharajas (Chakraborty 1996: 117). These tribals found it impossible to establish their ownership over land in the eyes of the modern state.

The Government under these circumstances started evicting those people on a winter night of December 1973 with the help of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Police, Home Guards and other Government officials (Deb 1996: 143). The people had

to take their children, cattle and utensils and flee to the hills. The people were beaten, tortured, humiliated, looted and then evicted from the Rhima Valley. In this connection, a mention may be made of the 'Tripura Sena'—a tribal volunteer force formed in 1969–70, that protested against the large–scale uprooting of the tribals from the Rhima Valley in the South District following the construction and 'alienated them from the State Government' (Bareh 2004: 24).

As per recorded history, since 1872 a good number of Chakmas immigrated from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and settled in the Gumti basin (Hunter 1873: 493), presently known in Silachari-Nutan Bazar as 'jiratia prajas'. The Mogs used to come to Sabroom as 'jiratias' (Roy Chowdhuri 1977: 120). Then the Noatias migrated from the same area and settled in the Rhima valley (*Dainik Sambad* 2002). Narankami of Rhima valley was a famous thickly populated Noatia village which is now submerged under water. After independence, a large number of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan was rehabilitated in Tripura. As a result, the indigenous Jamatias residing at Chalitabari and Moharcherra near Teliamura were evicted and they then migrated to the Rhima valley where they were able to rebuild their fortunes by sheer hard labour and by cultivating skills. But their happiness did not last long (Ibid). As per available records, a few refugee families from erstwhile East Pakistan were rehabilitated in Dumbur valley in 1958. Their settlements were categorized as 'colonies'. The refugee families used to produce plenty of rice, vegetables, etc., by dint of their hard labour and skill in cultivation. The construction of the dam led to the inundation of such villages as Narayan Bari, Lakshimpur, Bulangapasa, Kachucherra and also few more. The people of these villages who had to leave their homeland due to the curse of partition of India in 1947 were evicted once again. There was no accurate estimate of the number of people affected by the project. According to the file report of the Rehabilitation Department, Government of Tripura, 508 non-tribal persons were affected by the construction of the project. Most of them were fishermen or cultivators who used to cultivate in the fertile riverbed when the water receded particularly in the dry season. Most of them owned no land, but the river sustained those people. After construction of the project, most of them lost their only source of livelihood. Since they were apparently landless,

they were not qualified as 'project-affected' and were not eligible for rehabilitation.

A field study was conducted by a team comprising the members of the Public Accounts Committee and Estimates Committee of Tripura Legislative Assembly during 5, 6, and 7 November 1974. The team, in its report, made some valuable observations regarding the rehabilitation and compensation of the uprooted persons, which are mentioned below.

The Committee first visited the camp of oustees at Jagabandhupara. One hundred and fifty tribal oustees have been rehabilitated in that camp, but they have not yet been provided with any land. They cultivated some *jhum* lands but then those were also exhausted. There is no ration for them, nor is there any work. The lands distributed to them by the authority were the *kha*s (vested) lands which were in possession of the other landless *jhumia*s. One hundred eighteen local landless tribal and non-tribal people have complained to the Committee that they were evicted from their lands in the name of rehabilitation of the Dumbur oustees.

From 6 November 1974, the Committee started receiving complaint letters. Both tribal and Bengali displaced persons complained that they had neither received any compensation nor rehabilitation. They were not even given any identity card. It was also complained that the Government officers and employees changed the status of *kha*s lands to *jote* (privately owned) lands on receiving bribes. They also produced a list of beneficiaries of such illegal money. The oustees who received some small amount of compensation complained that they had to pay bribes of sufficient amount to the *tehsildar*s of Rhima and Gandacharra. They also had to pay Rs 10 each to Ershed Ali, an advocate of Udaipur, for identifying them. The oustees also demanded the right of cultivating their lands till the area is totally submerged. They also raised serious complaints against various malpractices and corruption of the Public Employment Officer (PEO) Roshan Lal. In a written complaint, they intimated that the PEO had embezzled a huge amount of money from the State Relief Fund. The members of the committee visited Duluma camp at Amarpur on 11 November 1974. There, one young man with some soil in his hand said: 'we have left behind very fertile lands having faith in your words, but you have rehabilitated us over rocks'.

Then the Committee visited Chelagong Punram Thakur Para camp where 50 rehabilitated persons were living a pathetic life. They said: 'you have brought us here for killing us.' The oustees rehabilitated at the camp of Hansapad Jamatia Para complained: 'we are spending days after days without food. We even have to mortgage our traditional necklaces made of gold coins. Now the Government has made these camps as prisons. Not a single one of our young men is getting a job in the Dumbur project. Our path of survival is being blocked by that way.'[7] It was hoped that 15 MW of energy would be generated from which huge revenue would be earned by the State Government and the whole state would be flush with electricity. It was also declared that there would be huge rise in the production of fish in the ponds and by selling the fish, the life style of the local people would be substantially improved. But now only 8 MW of energy is being generated against the installed 15 MW capacity. Fishes are not available even to meet the local demand let alone selling them to the government. The annual expenditure incurred for operation and maintenance of the Gumti Hydel project is more than Rs 3 crore (1 crore = 10,000,000) against which the income is less than even Rs 1 crore.

The evicted persons were assured of free electricity once the project was completed. In the financial year 1999–2000, the Dumbur oustees were brought under 'Kutir Jyoti' (literally 'lighting the huts') Project (Government of Tripura 1999: 14). But electricity was not considered as a basic amenity of the evicted persons, and no compensation was given to more than 10,000 tribal or non-tribal 'project affected' persons considered as landless.

There was a Mizo attack on the Gumti Project in the year 1969 when four project officials were killed and the diesel power set at Tirthamukh was damaged. An attack was also made on the project complex at Jatanbari, the police camps at Rambhadrapara and Jatanbari. They punctured tyres of the police jeep at Nutan Bazar. However the common people seemed to have been spared. The incident was reported to the police by the Project Authority.[8] Whatever be the version of the authorities on the attack, one wonders whether such attacks were organized as a mark of protest against the construction of the project. While it cannot be denied

that power requirement of the country is to be met by keeping the wheel of development moving, the displacement of such a large number of persons for such a small plant may not be considered by all as beneficial to the state. Already there is a demand from a few circles to dismantle the dam constructed at Tirthamukh and to rehabilitate the displaced persons of that area back into their original habitats. It may be added that the present demand of power at the peak period is 146 MW, out of which only 8 MW is contributed by Gumti Hydel Project (Government of Tripura 2002: 6). This can straightaway be purchased from the central grids. Decommissioning the dam and restoration of tribal lands will be a good gesture to the families affected by the project.

NOTES

1. Tripura Legislative Assembly proceedings, 9 October 1974, Series-VII, Vol. I, II, III, pp. 87–88. (Sukhmoy Sengupta, the then Chief Minister, in reply to the motion of no-confidence tabled by the Opposition).
2. Tripura Legislative Assembly Proceedings, 5 April 1974, Series-VII, Vol. I, II, III p. 33 (voting on demands for grants for 1974–75).
3. Tripura Legislative Assembly Proceedings, March 1975, Series-VIII, Vol. I, II, III, pp. 54–56.
4. Tripura Legislative Assembly Proceedings, 12 March 1975, p. 32.
5. Tripura Legislative Assembly Proceedings, March 1975, Series-VIII, Vol. I, II, III, pp. 28–29 (Debate on the speech of L.P. Singh, the then Hon'ble Governor of Tripura).
6. Tripura Legislative Assembly Proceedings, March 1974, Series-VI, Vol. I, II pp. 44–47.
7. Report of the Committee comprising the members of Public Accounts Committee and Estimates committee of Tripura Legislative Assembly, quoted in the article of Dasaratha Deb, published in *Tripura: Gana Andoloner Chhay Dasak*, op. cit. pp. 144–45.
8. As per statement of Land Acquisition Collector and Project Extension Officer, 1969, Dambur TD block.

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23

Landownership and Occupational Patterns of IDPs (1999–2001): A Case Study

RUMA SAHU AND AMITABHA SINHA

It has been argued by development economists that creation of employment opportunities in urban areas would induce migration from rural areas, and that this will have the double effect of increasing the stock of under-employed in the urban sector as well as keeping a tap on the rural-urban wage differentials.

However, these propositions fail to distinguish between migration and displacement. An economic migrant moves to a field of greater socio-economic opportunities. A displaced person may face a worse socio-economic condition after displacement. This paper does not deal with migration but displacement. The displacement is analyzed in terms of change in occupational pattern and ownership of land. This, however, is a narrow conceptualization of displacement. Further broadening of the displacement indicators, however, is possible.

The study is based on primary data collected from displaced households belonging to two villages:

1. Gabardi, Jampaijala block, Bishalgarh sub-division, West Tripura district.
2. Harijoy Chowdhury para, Jirania block, Majlispur tehsil, West Tripura district.

These villagers are now staying at (*a*) Fultali Rajyaswarinagar, Dukli Block, Bishalgarh Sub-division, West Tripura District; and (*b*) Krishnanagar and Jail Road, Sadar Sub-division, West Tripura District. The sample size is 40 households, out of which one household is Scheduled Caste, five households are Scheduled Tribe and the rest belong to the general category. We have employed purposive sampling method for our research. The data collected here suffers from the following limitations:

1. The results cannot be generalized.
2. The results cannot be called 'representative'.

The findings of our survey are:

1. The change in occupational pattern is shown in Table 23.1.

Table 23.1 Change in Occupational Pattern of Displaced Persons

Present occupation	*Previous occupation*
1. Government Service (11)	1. Government service (11)
2. Pensioner (1)	2. Pensioner (1)
3. Agricultural labourer (41)	3. Small farmer (2), farmer (19) agricultural cum daily labourer (20)
4. Meat seller (1)	4. Big farmer (1)
5. Vegetable seller (3)	5. Agricultural cum daily labourer (3)
6. Agricultural labourer cum fuel wood seller (4)	6. Agricultural cum daily labourer (2) agricultural labourer (2)
7. Agricultural labourer cum fried food seller (2)	7. Agricultural cum daily labourer (2)
8. Sawyer (Karati) (1)	8. Sawyer (Karati) cum, agricultural labourer (1)
9. Grocer (1)	9. Grocer (1)
10. Beggar (2)	10. Agricultural labourer (2)
11. Rickshaw puller (3)	11. Agricultural cum daily labourer (3)

Source: Field Study, June 2001.
Note: Figures in bracket refer to persons not households.

There are 10 female agricultural labourers and two government servants in the present occupation category.

2. The previous ownership pattern of cultivable land is shown in Table 23.2.

Table 23.2 Ownership of Cultivable Land

Type of farmer	*Size of land holding (in Kani)*	*No. of households*
Big farmer	10 and above	1
Farmer	5–10	5
Small farmer	Below 5	23

Source: Field Study, June 2001.

From these findings two things become clear: (*a*) there is genuine displacement of households as indicated by occupational change of farmers to daily labourers and rickshaw pullers, and (*b*) this is likely to have a negative impact on food security of the State because displacement most directly affects land-based occupations and activities.

The problem of internally displaced persons of Tripura has emerged as one of the most critical issues in the context of sustainable development and food security of the land-locked state. The problem is multi-disciplinary in character. An inter-disciplinary study group has to be formed to make an in-depth study of this emerging issue.

24

Internal Displacement: A Man-made Tragedy

Sukhendu Debbarma

People since time immemorial have been migrating from place to place due to various reasons. With the concept of nation-states and relatively rigid political boundaries it became difficult for people to move freely from one country to another. However, the difficulties do not deter people from moving from one place to another. In most of the cases, many of them are forced to leave their ancestral country/home due to various reasons like war, political turmoil, conflict, religious persecution and developmental projects carried out by national and State Governments. Many of them cross international borders and are entitled to refugee status while many more stay within their country where they feel safe and secure. The people who are displaced from their ancestral homes but remain within the country are classified as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

In India also, there are about 520,000 IDPs and it is estimated that there are approximately 200,000 IDPs in Tripura alone (the figure obviously varies from time to time).

Some government laws and policies like the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act 1960, the Forest Rules of Tripura 1952, Dumbur Hydro Project, which tend to deprive the indigenous people of their right of access to forests and forest resources and ownership and use of land have, turned them into IDPs. The communal riots

of 1980, and the ethnic clashes thereafter and most importantly prolonged insurgency have contributed to the alarming growth of IDPs in a small state like Tripura.

The Dumbur Hydro Power Project is one of the most blatant cases of government policy directly responsible for the creation of IDPs. The valley used to be a very rich fertile stretch of land watered by two rivers, Raima and Saima. These two rivers are considered as sisters and many rich legendary folk tales developed around them, forming part of the culture of the indigenous people (IP). The hydropower project was established in the early 1970s, as the state needed electricity to light up the towns. The total catchment area is approximately 33,800 ha that of which, 4,562 ha was submerged. The area, being fertile was producing surplus food-grains for more than 24,472 families. The valley was also rich in flora and fauna. There were protests and the IPs resisted tooth and nail against the construction of dams. But the government turned a deaf ear and did not consider any factor other than the generation of electricity mainly for the consumption of the urban people. The IP, till the last moment, tried their level best to remain in the land where their forefathers had lived for generations together. But the government having no sympathy for the IP did all they could do to evict the people. The people were given only a week's time to evacuate the valley and thereafter the security forces went on rampage and threatened and assaulted those who tried to resist the action of the government. The house roofs were removed forcefully and many of them stayed in houses without roofs before they finally left the place. Even elephants were used by the administration to trample and destroy the houses and belongings of the IP. Such government action compelled the IP to leave their homes. The government made many tall promises to the evicted IP but they remained only promises on paper. The compensation given by the government was not worth its name and whatsoever was given was only on paper. Even at its best, the compensation was meagre and the highest sum of Rs 1,910 was given to only about 100 families. Most of them were not given compensation on the ground that they were not able to produce written legal land documents. In fact, the IP never bothered to have any documents for the land that their forefathers had occupied for generations together. Had the necessity been felt, it

would have been done by the older generations. Theirs was a society where written documents did not hold any extra validity—if at all. Everything the IP owned was submerged for just 9 MW of electricity and the evicted people themselves are living in the dark, for the price of electricity is unaffordable for them.

The affected communities include the Tripuras, Reangs, Chakmas, Jamatias and Bengalis. Among the outstees the Bengalis were settled at Rajnagar, the Tripuras and Reangs at Raisabari and Bogafa in Birchandra Manu respectively, and some of them even went to Hailakandi in Assam. The family of Bilo Kumar Tripura remained in Hailakandi for some years but is now back again at Raisabari. The Jamatias settled themselves at Daluma in Chelagongmukh and the Chakmas at Raisabari, Gandachhera and Manughat (Longtrai Valley sub-division of Dhalai district). The people having sufficient lands and producing surplus food-grains at one time became uprooted and are the wretched of the earth—half-fed, illiterate, having no proper clothing and shelter. Is any compensation really worth this? The common people and the government (both state and central) have already forgotten them. Apart from the people, the flora and fauna also disappeared from the valley. Displacement leads to dispossession.

The conscientious citizens of the state and country will always remember the communal riot that took place in the month of June 1980—the first ever in the history of Tripura, with shock and sorrow. In fact, the incident is a dark spot in the glorious history of the once-princely state of Tripura. I have personally witnessed the incident. Our residence along with the rest in the village was burnt to ashes—leaving nothing. Few Bengali houses of the village were spared. The people in the village went to the safer places. It is painful to remember it. Thousands of people were affected, many thousand houses were burnt to ashes, many lost their lives and property worth millions of rupees along with livestock was destroyed. The loss is irreparable. Most importantly, the trust between the communities is at low ebb.

- In my village Chandithakur Kami, there were about 100 families before the communal riot of June 1980. However, after the riot also many came back and resettled in their ancestral

place but subsequent incidents around the village compelled many families to leave their home and hearth. These internally displaced families include both the tribals and the Bengalis (see Appendix I). These internally displaced families still dream of going back to their own village one day. Insurgency, ethnic and communal violence have affected both tribals and non-tribals and many of them had to leave their homes. The exact figure is not available but is believed to run into thousands.

- The Reserve Forest already set up by the Maharaja of Tripura and as per the records of 1940–50 accounted for 36.4 per cent of the total geographical area of Tripura but the total forest cover was 85.8 per cent. The Reserve Forest of the Maharaja was confined mainly to the plains and foothills. Four major hilly ranges inhabited by the indigenous people who practise slash and burn cultivation were kept free from the jurisdiction of the Reserve Forest. However, the policy changed later and only the hilly range under Belonia sub-division that extends to Sabroom is Tekka-Tulsi where the indigenous people lived in numbers was kept free. Tekka-Tulsi Reserve Forest was constituted taking the entire hill range. Similarly Baramura-Debatamura Reserve Forest, Atharamura, Kalajari Reserve Forest, Longtarai Reserve Forest, Central Catchments Reserve Forest, etc., were constituted covering the traditional home of the indigenous people. A sample survey that was conducted in recent times shows the following numbers of families practising slash and burn cultivation in such places:

1. North district 7,502 families.
2. South district 7,607 families.
3. West district 4,799 families.
   Total: 19,908 families

Bona-fide house holders and cultivators who are inhabitants of villages entirely surrounded by Reserved Forests may have an entitlement to forest produce free of royalty only up to a limit, for their own personal use but not for barter or sale. Notification No. 2 dated 29 April 1952 stipulates certain reserved trees and imposes restrictions on certain activities. In notification No. 3 dated 29 April 1952

certain restrictions, rights and concessions are discussed. Among other things shifting cultivation is allowed in Protected Forests (and not in Reserved Forests) by hill men *jhumia*s.

Many of these people from the reserved forest areas are holding government jobs and few of them are in the central services. Now the question is: can we expect the class I government officers to build and live in thatched houses? For instance, Jampui Hill is entirely under the Catchments Reserved Forest and no land right ownership is given to the Lushai people living there. It also means that the people are living in the villages of Jampui hills, *illegally* occupying the forestland, and could be evicted any time. Certainly, the people of the Jampui hills were there even before the law which declares them as illegal occupants came into being. Many of the Lushai people left the Jampui hill villages and went and settled in other places mainly in neighbouring Mizoram, where they could avail themselves of land ownership rights. Thus, the forest law is responsible for the internal displacement of the indigenous people from their ancestral land.

In conclusion, it can be said that displacement due to any reason whatsoever is a painful process and it leaves a deep psychological impact on the affected people and embitters the relations between groups in society. All right-thinking people and the civil society must come forward to find a solution to this burning problem. If we run away from or simply ignore them, the future of this beautiful state is doomed.

APPENDIX-I

Internally Displaced People of Chandithakur Kami, Under Bishalgarh Sub-Division, West Tripura District, Tripura (As on 30 June 2001)

Non-Tribal

Name of the affected head of the family	Occupation
1. Rajendra (Late) Debnath and family	Cultivator
2. Jamini (Late) Debnath and family	Cultivator
3. Dr Monmohan Debnath and family	Village doctor

4.	Harendra (Late) Debnath and family	Cultivator
5.	Prafulla Debnath and family	Cultivator
6.	Manmohan Debnath and family	Cultivator
7.	Lal Mohan Debnath and family	Cultivator
8.	Lil Mohan and family	Shopkeeper
9.	Kartik and family	Cultivator
10.	Monoranjan	Govt. school teacher
11.	Manindra Baishnab	Cultivator
12.	Banamali Debnath and family	Cultivator
13.	Tarak Debnath and family	Cultivator
14.	Madan Debnath and family	Cultivator
15.	Sadan Debnath and family	Cultivator
16.	Prangopal Debnath and family	Govt. employee

Tribal

	Name of the affected head of the family	Occupation
1.	Sudhangsu Debbarma and family	Govt. employee
2.	Late Santi Kr Debbarma and family	Cultivator
3.	Late Jatindra Debbarma and family	Cultivator
4.	Dinabandhu Debbarma and family	Cultivator
5.	Mangal Debbarma and family	Cultivator
6.	Ranabir Debbarma and family	State govt. employee
7.	Harsha Mohan Debbarma and family	Tailor
8.	Mahamani Debbarma and family	Cultivator
9.	Bhupendra Debbarma and family	Cultivator
10.	Tara Chandra Debbarma and family	Cultivator
11.	Manai Debbarma and family	Cultivator
12.	Gadadar Debbarma and family	Cultivator
13.	Sarat Debbarma and family	Cultivator
14.	Jagai Debbarma and family	Cultivator
15.	Ramani Debbarma and family	Central govt. employee
16.	Harendra Debbarma and family	Cultivator
17.	Girendra Debbarma and family	State govt. employee
18.	Rabindra Debbarma and family	Cultivator
19.	Arun Debbarma and family	Cultivator
20.	Late Basanta Debbarma and family	Cultivator

21.	Subodh Debbarma and family	Cultivator
22.	Padarai Debbarma and family	Cultivator
23.	Anil Debbarma and family	Cultivator
24.	Late Jatindra Debbarma and family	Cultivator
25.	Rajendra Debbarma and family	Cultivator
26.	Shyam Sunder Debbarma and family	Cultivator
27.	Dilu Kumar Debbarma and family	Cultivator
28.	Ramaboli Debbarma and family	Cultivator
29.	Sachin Debbarma and family	Cultivator

APPENDIX II

Interviews and Reminiscences

1. Interview with Mr Birendra Tripura, Raishya Bari on 28 June 2001, now serving as Branch Manager, Tripura Gramin Bank, Dumachhera branch, Longtrai valley sub-division, Dhalai district. Mr Tripura was one of the internally displaced people of the Dumbur Hydro Project. When the project was to be implemented, he saw with his own eyes how the government security forces broke the roof of their house and they spent many nights in the house without a roof and ultimately had to vacate. Mr Tripura recollected and related the whole incident of displacement very painfully to the author.
2. Interview with Mr Rohmingliana Lushai IFS, Sabual village (Jampui Hills, North Tripura) on 29 June 2001, now serving as Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Government of Tripura.
3. The author Mr Sukhendu Debbarma who hails from Chandithakur Kami, Bishalgarh sub-division, West Tripura District himself saw how the communal riot of June 1980 led to the burning of the village by the Bengali miscreants. The neighbours who were Bengalis also escaped to safer places. However, it is pertinent to mention here that the houses of Late Rajendra Debnath, Profulla Debnath and Harendra Debnath were not burnt.

Later in the month of December 1980 when peace was restored, the author's family along with some of the families in the village came and constructed a new house in the village. However, in January 1987 in a neighbouring village, a Bengali family was attacked by the TNV (Tribal National Volunteers)—an insurgent group. In retaliation, the Bengali miscreants attacked the author's house along with other tribal houses and all the properties were looted and destroyed. Thereafter, the author along with others left the village.

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Tripura Land Revenue and Reforms Act 1960.

25

The Case of Urabari Mohanpur Block

Chandrika Basu Majumder

In Tripura, thousands of people—mostly Bengalis—have been displaced from their habitation due to prolonged spells of insurgency and ethnic tension in the state. The displaced populations have been facing many socio-cultural economic and psychological problems. The socio-economic networks are broken. Earning a livelihood is becoming an everyday problem for these people. This increasing insecurity and tension may become another source of conflict.

The internal displacement resulting from the Kashmir conflict receives a lot of attention while the situation of those displaced in the North East is relatively unknown. As the US Committee for Refugees (USCR) correctly points out: '...the displacement in North East India has gone virtually unnoticed' (2000).

The aim of the paper is to throw light on the socio-economic effects of displacement upon the villagers of Urabari—a small village of Mohanpur block, West Tripura district.

URABARI OF MOHANPUR BLOCK

Urabari is a small village of South Taranagar Panchayat in Mohanpur block. Extremists attacked the village on several occasions as a result

of which the residents, mainly consisting of Bengalis, were forced to leave their homes and take shelter in the adjacent areas. The massacre of December 1999 made all the 49 families leave the village and take refuge in South Taranagar school. The displaced people lived there for 11 months. Now, again on the basis of assurance given by the state administration, most of the families have gone back to their places of residence, whereas some of them have resettled themselves in the Sanitala area of Mohanpur bazar. The affected people furnished the following information in the course of my interviews with some of them.[1]

1. Before 1950, when the settlers came to settle at Urabari, the area was deeply forested and only a few scattered settlements of the Oriya tribal community had been living there. The people belong mainly to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) community and are agriculturalist by occupation. Before the riot of 1980 they lived a peaceful life. In June 1980, all the dwelling places of the Bengali people were burnt and the people had to take shelter at Mohanpur Class XI school.
2. The village was again attacked by the extremists in January I995 and some of the houses were burned. Anjan Deb, a boy of 18 years was killed by the extremists. Again in January 1998, five villagers—Binanda Debnath, Paresh Debnath, his mother Minu Chakraborty and her mother—were killed in an extremist attack.
3. Finally, December 1999 was a nightmare to the villagers of Urabari and they were compelled to take temporary shelter at Taranagar school for about one year. In response to the query regarding the type of assistance rendered by the government, the respondents informed me that they were given food for the first six days of their eleven-month stay in the temporary stay at the Taranagar camp. Sometimes they were given assistance in the form of man-days by the Block Development Office of Mohanpur.[2]
4. In response to the question whether they received any assistance from any NGO, the respondents replied in the negative.

Even during their stay in the camp, no assistance was rendered by any organization or international agency. Almost all the people of the village are dependent on land and agriculture. Only two persons are service-holders in the village. Quite naturally, being uprooted from their homestead, the people had to experience hardship in order to earn their livelihood. Some of them were forced to act as daily wage labourers at cheaper rates. The children could not go to school for one year. On the other hand, hundreds of students of Taranagar school had to stop school education about one year as the school was turned into a relief camp.

5. One of the conditions of the villagers to return to their homes or places of habitual residence was the arrangement of a permanent Tripura State Rifles (TSR) camp in the village. Previously, the camp was there but in the month of November 1998 it was withdrawn amidst mass protest from the villagers. Being apprehensive of extremist attack, the villagers tried to resist the decision of withdrawal of TSR camp from the area. They squatted on the road disrupting traffic for 48 hours but the administration did not accede to their demand. Some of the protesters suffered injuries.

Most of the IDPs in Tripura live in deplorable conditions and still in temporary settlement. Assistance, mostly provided by the State Government is insufficient and sporadic. The Union Government has no plan for providing relief or rehabilitation to the IDPs of Tripura. The urgent need of the hour is to evolve a national, legal and humanitarian framework in order to cater to the needs of a displaced population and, if possible, to avoid any further displacement.

NOTES

1. Interviews with some of the displaced persons from Urabari now living at Sanitala of Mohanpur bazar.
2. Information about assistance given to me by the Block Development Office, Mohanpur block.

REFERENCE

US Committee for Refugees (USCR). 2000. *World Refugee Survey 2000.* Washington DC: UCRC.

Section V
The North East

26

Birth of a Problem

Sudhir Kumar Singh and Sristidhar Dutta

Although the problem of refugees in India (especially in North East India) and elsewhere in the world is a subject of widespread popular discussion, there is hardly any definition or discussion on the 'Internally Displaced Persons'. Until the decade of the 1970s, the North East received a large number of refugees and economic migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh (the erstwhile East Pakistan) and Nepal, and to a lesser extent from Burma (now Myanmar). As a result, the demographic character of some of the states in the region underwent a sea change. Tripura and Assam are glaring examples of demographic balance rapidly tilting against the indigenous interest. The waves of refugees, besides causing disturbance to demography, have caused displacement of the indigenous populations from their ancestral lands in Tripura and Assam.

But till recent times, this internal displacement was interpreted—much to the consolation of the indigenous people—as 'land alienation only'. For displacement, not instantly visible, generally takes place quietly by peaceful means without any direct conflict. Only when the indigenous people and their 'agitating or militant youths', realizing the danger to their existence, begin to give vent to their resentment through mass protests and social movements like in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Meghalaya, does displacement draw public attention. Till now in media circles, no proper distinction has been made between the refugees and the IDPs and sometimes the latter are referred as 'internal refugees'.

CAUSES OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

Now coming to the causes that effect internal displacement; considering the magnitude of the problem, it would not be possible in the span of a short chapter to outline all the causes. Only a few discernible causes have been sketched below:

1. War, including civil war, is a major cause of internal displacement. In the Sino-Indian War of 1962 a large number of people of Arunachal Pradesh (the then NEFA) who had to move down to Assam for temporary shelter, became internally displaced. Language conflicts and riots also sometimes cause internal displacement. The language riots of 1960 caused large scale internal displacement both from the Brahmaputra and the Barak valleys of Assam.
2. In the last two decades, thousands of people, both tribal and non-tribal, were displaced all over North East India. Some of them have been assimilated into new areas while others are still living a pitiable camp life. Their displacement is induced by both development and inter-group conflicts. For example, the Dambur Hydel Project uprooted and displaced at least 5,000 tribal families of Tripura. The Kaptai Hydel Project in Bangladesh uprooted thousands of Chakmas and Hajongs who would have been internally displaced persons in Bangladesh if they had not crossed the international borders of India. By becoming refugees in India they have now become responsible for displacement of the indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh because they have been settled in a part of the state by the Government of India.
3. Government policies, some of which are well-intentioned, also become causes of internal displacement. In Arunachal Pradesh, the well-intentioned government policy of liberating the Sulungs from the age-old system of slavery has caused internal displacement of the Sulung people for want of proper and continuous rehabilitation.
4. A major cause of internal displacement is due to the occurrence of natural calamities like earthquakes and floods. The 1950

earthquake caused large scale internal displacement in Assam, particularly in the Sadiya region. The recent flood of the Siang River has also caused displacement in the erstwhile Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

5. Displacement is also caused by takeover of land by the immigrating communities. This kind of displacement has been feared from the Chakma and Hajong refugees of Arunachal Pradesh whose population has been nearing a million and this expanding population has started grabbing land even in a reserved forest like the Namdapha National Park in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

The causes enumerated so far are only suggestive, certainly not exhaustive. It is of course the bounden duty of the academicians, planners and the people in power to join hands to find out ways and means to pre-empt the problem from occuring in the future. Otherwise, we should take some steps to at least reduce the magnitude of suffering of all those who have already been internally displaced by various factors.

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Paradigm of Development: A Critique

Deepak Mishra

The present paper, apart from summarizing the findings of earlier studies on the nature, causes and implications of population displacement, attempts to develop a critique of the dominant development paradigm within which the development–displacement inter-linkages are analyzed. It argues in favour of a historically informed understanding of the macro processes of capital accumulation, environmental degradation and dispossession in order to overcome certain limitations of the existing studies in development–displacement nexus. This alternative framework of analysis is used here to demonstrate the underlying processes of displacement in Arunachal Pradesh.

VOLUNTARY AND INVOLUNTARY MIGRATION

The rich and diverse discourse on displacement and rehabilitation, notwithstanding the differences in emphasis, has questioned the mainstream notions of industrialization-led development and has also attempted to articulate the rights of the displaced persons as citizens and human beings. Displacement is generally viewed as an undesirable yet inevitable outcome of the development projects initiated by the state. Often, displacement is defined as the process

of expropriation of land and other assets in order to allow a *project* to proceed for the *overall social good*. Conceptually, a distinction is made between involuntary and voluntary migrations of population. It is argued that voluntary mobility, including rural-urban migration, results from both push and pull factors. Essentially, such mobility reflects people's willingness and ability to shift to new places and for better opportunities and is considered as natural and desirable in the course of economic transformation and growth. On the other hand, involuntary mobility or displacement is a result of push factors alone. The age composition of the migrant population is also different in both cases. While the people who migrate voluntarily are generally young families in the early stages of their household life cycle, entire populations—irrespective of their age composition—are forced to move in the case of involuntary displacement. Again, in case of voluntary mobility, migration is usually a gradual process in the sense that social and economic ties with the village, from where one moves, are maintained and these serve as a safety net in the face of adverse circumstances in a new and alien environment. Forced migration is marked by a disruption in diverse risk-sharing and social insurance mechanisms. Often a distinction between disaster-induced displacement and development-induced displacement is also emphasized. In case of displacements caused by calamities like flood, cyclone, famine and war, it is generally possible for people to return to their original places of residence after a short period and hence short-term relief measures assume importance in the rehabilitation package. Development-induced displacement is permanent and hence it necessitates different and long-term rehabilitation assistance.

A CRITIQUE OF THE CERNEA MODEL

One of the most well-known conceptual frameworks to study displacement and rehabilitation is the model developed by a leading World Bank consultant and policy analyst—Michael Cernea. His model has been used and operationalized by many scholars while studying displacement and rehabilitations in different contexts. The model, called the Impoverishment, Risk and Rehabilitation

(IRR) Model, is basically an analytical framework drawing upon a number of earlier studies. Despite the enormous diversity of project-specific situations, the various kinds of risks that threaten the survival of the displaced persons are landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality, loss of common property resources and services, and social disarticulation.

The numerous micro studies of displacement experiences in various parts of the country have definitely broadened our understanding of the process of deprivation and marginalization created by large-scale human dislocation. Nevertheless, in spite of recognizing the similarities in impact of various development projects on the displacement of persons, most of the studies predicated on the Cernea model have not been able to establish the structural and historical lines between such development projects. The IRR framework, for example, accepts such projects as inevitable and then considers its implications. The various rounds of displacements are generally conceptualized as repetitive but distinct events. This restricted view not only leaves many other forms of displacement outside the scope of analysis, some of which will be discussed later, but also limits the analytical framework to the effect that many crucial casual mechanisms are excluded from the discussion.

First, to define displacement as physical dislocation caused by development projects in general and mega projects in particular is to de-emphasize the structural and historical character of the development process. There are many cases where people are displaced not because of an abrupt mega event like construction of a dam or a power plant but through a slow and painful process of deliberate undermining of the natural, economic and institutional basis of their survival. These processes like changes in land and water management systems, ecological degradation, pollution of water bodies, the establishment of monocultures in land, in water and in forest are also the result of the so-called development process and their impact on people, if judged in proper perspective, are no less catastrophic.

Second, the displacement-rehabilitation studies are generally conceptualized in a state versus people framework. To be sure, some of these studies are based on sophisticated and nuanced understanding

of the political economy of development and state intervention in an underdeveloped economy but a majority of them treat displacement as an outcome of state interventions alone. This may be because of the fact that land for both public and private projects are acquired by state departments and in either case it is the state which is expected to pay the compensation. However, displacement is the ultimate outcome of a process of economic transformation that operates through the larger mechanisms of capital accumulation, natural resources extraction and profit generation. By questioning the role of state in the process, these studies have definitely undermined the idea of a neutral, benevolent or pro-poor state, but at the same time by focusing exclusively on the state they have blurred the class character of the development initiatives.

Apart from that, this framework of analyzing displacement will face serious problems in the emerging scenario under globalization and liberalization. The Draft National Policy of Rehabilitation, prepared in 1996 by the Ministry of Rural Development, in its opening paragraph admits that with the advent of the New Economic Policy it is expected that 'there will be large-scale investments both on account of internal generation of capital and increased inflow of foreign investments, thereby creating an enhanced demand for land *to be provided within* a *short time span* in an increasingly competitive market-led economic structure.' That the causes and dimensions of future and ongoing displacement can not be properly analyzed without incorporating the changing dynamics of global capital accumulation can hardly be over emphasized. Most of the policy-oriented studies, like the IRR framework itself, generally accept displacement as given and then work towards a better rehabilitation package, so as to minimize resistance to the project. Cernea's IRR model, in fact, does not allow us to raise the fundamental questions about the desirability of the projects.

TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK

What follows is basically a preliminary attempt to suggest an alternative framework for analyzing the phenomenon of displacement.

The starting point is the explicit recognition of the fact that the debate on displacement, project-induced or otherwise, is not just about a comparison between aggregate costs and benefits but also about the distribution of such costs and benefits among individuals, classes and communities. When the desirability or otherwise of investment decisions or changes in resource-use patterns are decided in a structured, hierarchical and class-divided society, political economy, I think this is the proper analytical framework to begin with.

Old fashioned as it may sound, some fundamental confusions can be avoided if we start from the classical writing on *dispossession*. In his discussion on primitive accumulation, Marx has categorically stated that 'capitalism presupposes the complete separation of labourers from all property by which they can realize their labour.' The history of this expropriation, through which peasant-producers and others become free labourers in the double sense of the term, notes Marx, is written in the annals of mankind in the letters of blood and fire. He was aware that the history of this expropriation in different countries, assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different periods. But his basic point was that dispossession of independent producers from their means of production is a fundamental precondition for the commodification of labour-power, which in turn is essential for capitalism in its classic form to develop. His chapter on 'The Modern Theory of Colonization' in *Das Kapital* brings out the argument more forcefully refuting the bourgeois thesis that capital (a thing) originated in the fruitful exercise of the producer's own capacity of labour, while labour-power as a commodity arose through a voluntary social contract. Marx cites the role of legislation and force to prevent migrant workers in the colonies to be owners of the means of production. Because, as long as 'labour can accumulate for himself and this he can do as long as he remains possessor of his means of production-capitalist accumulation and capitalist mode of production are impossible.' To cite these arguments is not to presume that the classic process is reproduced everywhere, but to emphasize that dispossession and what is often called 'displacement' has its historical roots. Notwithstanding the unevenness in the spatial dynamics of capital accumulation, large-scale displacements

are not simply, 'the undesirable, unintended and unfortunate consequences of otherwise beneficial projects'; they are essential and defining features of capitalist expansion in an underdeveloped economy. Displacement or dispossession as a process does not start with establishment of specific projects; in fact, what is conventionally called displacement is only the more brutal, abrupt and large-scale manifestations of an ongoing process of pauperization and creation of proletarians during capitalist reconstruction.

Capital enters into underdeveloped regions for broadly three different interests: (*a*) raw materials; (*b*) market; and (*c*) strengthening state power. In this process, the pre-capitalist social formations are differentiated, but the degree and character of differentiation may not follow a uniform pattern. If we look at the different projects or sources of displacement even in the conventional framework, most of them are necessary primarily to serve the interests of capital in all the three dimensions, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. But apart from such extractive activities, infrastructure projects and establishment of military industrial complexes, we can also analyze a number of other processes, which are ultimately results of capitalist expansion into tribal areas. Not all of them are direct, visible and immediate in terms of their effects, but the brutal similarities in their impacts is dispossession and dislocation of the population.

The other crucial dimension of this alternative framework being suggested is the necessity to bring in the historical dimension of the problem. One of the crucial features of many displacement studies is their blatant negligence of this dimension. The dynamics of capitalist expansion can be fruitfully analyzed only on the basis of the historical evolution of the social formations with all their specificities and peculiarities. A historical understanding of the changes in the modes and relations of production, the property rights regimes, the modes of resource use and extraction are essential to analyze the dynamics of dispossession, marginalization and dislocation.

The other conceptual building block in this framework is the 'ecological' dimensions of capitalist expansion. The starting point is to recognize that the crisis of environment is not a crisis of nature but a crisis of society. The causes of environmental destruction that face us today are not biological or the products of individual human choice.

They are social and historical, rooted in the productive relations, technological imperatives, and historically conditioned demographic trends that characterize the dominant social system. To emphasize the link between environmental degradation and capitalism is not to assume that all non-capitalist social formations were free from the problem, but to remind ourselves that with the onslaught of capitalism 'some sort of hegemonic economistic-engineering discourse has come to dominate the discussion of environmental questions, commodifying everything and subjecting all transactions to the singular logic of commercial profitability and cost benefit calculus.' The links between slow or abrupt dislocation of population in underdeveloped countries and regions of the world are to be understood in the context of this aggressive expansionary drive of global capitalism in the post-Cold War period.

A NOTE ON ARUNACHAL PRADESH

If we accept the conventional definition of displacement, we do not find evidences of large-scale project-induced displacement in Arunachal Pradesh. Land has been acquired for public purposes, but because of low land-man ratio and the policy framework adopted by the Indian state, so far large-scale eviction or displacement has not taken place. However, if we accept the wider definition and see it as a process then many trends in the state are quite disturbing. The emergence of private property over resources, privatization of common property, rise in the incidence of landlessness, destruction of common property for private benefit, commercialization of the agro-food systems, disruption of traditional social safety-networks are all part of the same processes which cause dispossession, marginalization and ultimately result in displacement.

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Waiting for Elusive Resettlement and Rehabilitation?

Monirul Hussain

The unprecedented brutal ethnic violence that rocked Assam's Karbi Anglong Hill District during the months of October to December 2005 has brought to the fore once again the question of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in North East India. IDPs and Refugees are obviously highly marginalized and excluded of all social groups. Their status is very similar, except that, to become a refugee one must cross an international border; an IDP does not cross the border of his/her country. Technically, an IDP is a citizen but empirically s/he is a refugee in his/her own country. Both the groups lack a voice of their own, and many a times they remain neglected and invisible. By and large, they remain outside the glare of public 'consciousness', experiencing a high degree of alienation, marginalization, and exclusion from the larger society. Hence, they deserve attention from the state and the civil society.

North East India is a very distinct civilizational, geographical, socio-economic, cultural and political entity in India. As a result of distorted environmental, socio-economic and political transformation, the entire region has experienced massive internal displacement of population. Perhaps this region has generated the highest number of IDPs in India. The citizen-IDP ratio in North East India is indeed very high. It is, of course, very difficult to ascertain the exact number of IDPs in the region. However, we must point out explicitly

all the three categories of IDPs, that is, environment, conflict and development-induced IDPs in all the seven states of North East India—Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, barring Sikkim. People of these states have suffered immensely from environmental damages, brutality of state sponsored development and both, actual and potential violence caused by political conflict for exclusive ethnic territory, space and identity.

- As a result of continuous environmental degradation, flood and riverbank erosion in the plains and landslides in the hills have become endemic. This has caused innumerable deaths, destruction and population displacement. The intensity of floods, riverbank erosion and landslides has increased substantially over the years in terms of area and victims. It would be pertinent to point out that the plight of the riverbank erosion induced IDPs is much more severe than that of the victims of flood. The victims of flood at least can go back to their original land once the flood water recedes. However, the riverbank erosion induced ID peasants cannot go back to and cultivate their land because, their land has become a part of river's new/extended bed. It is not only the mighty river Brahmaputra but also the innumerable small and medium sized rivers that are causing havoc mainly to the plains of Assam, that is, the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak Valley.
- The North East has remained an economically blocked and underdeveloped region in India despite being rich in terms of natural resources. Whatever development has taken place in North East India during the entire postcolonial period under the state initiatives has caused massive displacement of population, particularly of the tribal groups. Even in a state like Assam wherein the tribals constitute no more than 12 per cent of the population, they have borne the brunt of development-induced displacement.
- North East India has remained a politically sensitive and disturbed region since it entered the postcolonial phase of its history. Its perpetual vulnerability to ethnic conflicts and

its resultant violence has caused innumerable deaths and massive displacement of population in the region. Unfortunately, the question of conflict-induced IDPs does not find any place in the agenda for building peace and conflict resolution in the North East. Here, the benefits of any state sponsored rehabilitation package go to the insurgents/ex-insurgents and the criminal elements amongst the insurgents only. Right to rehabilitation has only been granted to the ex-insurgents. This precious right has been systematically denied to the actual IDPs.

ESTIMATE OF IDPs

It is difficult to ascertain the exact number of IDPs in the North East because even the states do not keep proper data on IDPs. Of course, for the state it is cumbersome to acknowledge the existence of IDPs because it reflects 'state failure'. The state is not at all transparent in this regard. Besides, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for individual scholars or journalists to investigate the situation because of inaccessibility of conflict zones and the people living therein.

- It is difficult to estimate the number of IDPs caused by environmental degradation like floods, riverbank erosion and landslides. However, it is possible to draw some reasonable conclusions about the enormity of the problem. The flood of 2004 alone affected more than 10 million people in the Assam valley. Most of them are ordinary peasants. Excepting two hill districts, all the districts of the plains of Assam experienced devastating floods and riverbank erosion. In an unprecedented flash flood in October 2004, nearly 1,000 people died in Goalpara district. The government provided some relief to some of these flood-affected people, which was far from adequate. The situation demands proper, scientific assessment and adequate relief and rehabilitation measures. It is not only the flood that pushed the people of Assam into an uncertain future; the riverbank erosion too has affected millions of people. Over the years, environmental insecurity

has increased substantially. According to an official report, the river Brahmaputra eroded 429,657 ha of prime agricultural land. Roughly 7 per cent of the land in the plains has been eroded between 1951 and 2000. This has definitely displaced at least 3,000,000 peasants. Today they constitute the most pauperized community in Assam's plains. In the absence of a proper resettlement and rehabilitation policy, most of them have experienced multiple displacement.

- In the absence of a proper database, it is difficult to ascertain the number of development-induced IDPs in North East India. However, we can have a broad idea about the enormity of the problem from the following facts. The Dumbur Hydroelectric Project in Tripura ejected 8,000 families from prime agricultural land displacing about 40,000 tribal people. The Pagladiya Dam Project in Assam, if implemented, will displace about 105,000 people from their land. Besides, the Kaptai Hydroelectric Project in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, displaced a large number of tribal Chakmas. It too had a severe spill-over effect in the North East. About 40,000 of the Kaptai project-affected people were shifted to erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), now Arunachal Pradesh. Till now, the Chakmas numbering about 80,000 have remained stateless in India, still awaiting the ever-elusive Indian citizenship.

The Government of India is now proposing to construct 145 dams of different varieties, including mega dams, in North East India. This region is ecologically fragile and vulnerable to high intensity earthquakes. Hence, the people are questioning the very wisdom of mega dam projects in the North East. The Naga, Kuki and Hmar people who are going to be affected by the ongoing Tipaimukh Hydroelectric Project are vehemently opposed to the construction of the dam on their 'sacred' land/site. Similarly, the people of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts of Upper Assam are opposed to the construction of the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project being constructed at a site near Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border. This area was affected by a severe earthquake in 1950. People consider it to be a big threat to their lives and existence. The potential displacees of the

Pagladiya Dam Project are resisting the construction of the dam. Dams have become a major source of displacement and threat to the future of the entire North East India. If we combine all the categories of development-induced displacement together with the displacees of urbanization, it is likely to be a massive 3,000,000 plus IDPs in the North East. Significantly, most of the development-induced IDPs in the North East, like in the rest of India, are the tribal people.

- The North East has a large army of conflict-induced IDPs. Though, we do not have exact data on this, we can with a fair degree of certainty talk about the number of IDPs in Kokrajhar district in lower Assam. Till April 2005, 126,263 inmates were living in 38 state sponsored relief camps in the district. Besides, there are also relief camps in Bongaigaon, Dhubri, Barpeta, Karbi Anglong, North Cachar and Cachar districts in Assam. At one stage there were more than 200,000 IDPs living in the relief camps in Kokarjhar district alone. All these IDPs were the victims of the Bodoland movement. Some of these conflict-induced IDPs are living in the camps for more than a decade now. The government is providing only rice to the inmates of some of the camps for 10 days a month. The IDPs are living a dehumanized life in the camp. Significantly, the government has stopped rations for the inmates of many camps.

There are about 40,000 Reang/Bru IDPs living in state sponsored relief camps in Assam and Tripura. They were displaced from Mizoram as a result of the ethnic conflict. Approximately 40,000 Chin refugees who were working at the lower level jobs in Mizoram for quite a long time were forced to go back to Myanmar from where they had fled to Mizoram earlier. Then, there are a large number of conflict-induced IDPs in Manipur because of the Naga-Kuki conflict there. The Hmar and Dimasa conflict also displaced several thousand people in the district of North Cachar Hills in Assam. The conflict between the Karbis and the non-Karbis also displaced thousands in Karbi Anglong Hill District in 2003 and 2004. Very recently, the October 2005 ethnic violence in Karbi Anglong Hill District has alone displaced more than 60,000 tribal people belonging to the

Karbi and Dimasa tribes. Hence, as of now Assam alone has more the 200,000 IDPs in various relief camps, both in the plains and the hills, awaiting resettlement and rehabilitation. Additionally, the 'periodic' movements against outsiders in Assam and Meghalaya have displaced a large number of people silently. They have gone virtually undocumented.

Most IDPs living in camps receive little medical care and their children have neither access to formal education nor to health services. Though some receive food aid, it often arrives sporadically and is insufficient in quantity and nutrition. Within the IDP communities, the children and the women suffer most. Throughout the North East, conditions of the displaced are pathetic and no inter-governmental or international organizations are present. The displaced live in most degrading and dehumanized conditions in public buildings and makeshift shelters. They have lost their most precious possessions—land, home and livelihood. If we look at the IDP issue from the perspective of the 'impoverishment risk model' developed by Michael Cernea, we find that all the IDPs of the North East suffer from landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality, loss of access to common property rights, social disarticulation and disintegration.

We must point out that in the North East there are cases in which one person has experienced the same kind of displacement more than once. Similarly, one may become the victim of environmentally-induced displacement repeatedly and at the same time the same person may experience conflict-induced displacement in his/her new place of residence or livelihood. For example, a person displaced by flood or riverbank erosion may cross the boundaries of his district or region in search of livelihood, and s/he may become a victim of conflict-induced displacement. This happens very often in Assam. And the 'displaced', which is supposed to be a temporary/transitory status, becomes a permanently displaced person waiting and struggling to survive in an all-encompassing situation of fear, vulnerability and uncertainty. It seems that the displaced people in Assam in most cases, experience displacement more than once in a lifetime; it is a

serialized and multiplied experience. It appears to have become an inseparable part of the postcolonial political economy of the region.

Are we in a position to stop or at least reduce the number of IDPs in North East India? This is a difficult question to answer. Obviously the ongoing process of perilous environmental injuries, developmental brutalities and sharpening of exclusivist ethnicity and its resultant violence, all have together propelled massive internal displacement of population in the North East. I presume this will continue with a higher degree of intensity in future until and unless we look afresh at the whole gamut of environmental, developmental and political issues involved in the specific context of North East. The issue of IDPs in this region deserves special attention and care of the larger civil society and the Indian state. The state needs to overcome what looks like its perennial governance deficit in the North East. Similarly, civil society needs to fight against the perennial human rights violation in the region. To address the IDP issue one requires political will; we would maintain that this remains the real obstacle to stop avoidable displacement of population anywhere in India, including the North East. It would be of crucial importance to remove the environmental, developmental and political conditions and processes that have been responsible for the generation of IDPs in North East India. Besides, in the absence of a clear-cut IDP regime in India, one can look into 'UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement' in order to address the humanitarian and the rights-specific issues involved in the IDPs question in the North East and in India.

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Challenges Ahead

Subir Bhaumik

Internal displacement in North East India is a relatively new phenomenon. Until the 1970s, the North East received huge inflows of refugees and economic migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) and Nepal, and to a lesser extent from Burma. As a result, the demographic character of some states in the region underwent a sea change. Tripura became a Bengali-majority state, leaving its indigenous tribes feeling marginalized. In Assam, Bengali Hindus and Muslims probably outnumber the ethnic Assamese now, though some doubt has been expressed about that contention. The first waves of the refugee influx, following Partition, displaced the indigenous populations from their ancestral lands. And when the indigenous groups—and militias raised by their youth—began to give vent to their resentment through armed action against the settlers, the North East began to wake up to large-scale internal displacement.

The local media and administration continued to describe even the internally displaced as 'refugees', in spite of the fact that they did not cross over from another country. The states in India's federal polity may not enjoy as much power as the states in the USA, but because every single Indian state or region is so much rooted in tradition and enjoys such a distinct sense of identity that they often behave like nations would with each other. So, the response to 'a mass exodus' from one state to another has often evoked a response similar to

that witnessed in the case of mutually hostile nations sending out refugees and receiving them.

The internalization of the displacement, in the sense that it happened within the boundaries of the Indian nation-state, has, therefore, not always resulted in an easy solution to the problems of displacement.

Certainly not in North East India, where a resurgence of tribal identities since the Naga rebellion—and New Delhi's response to it by making Nagaland a full-fledged state—have led to dozens of statehood demands or for creation of autonomous district councils or regional councils. Not to speak of the separatist rebel groups involved in armed struggle against Indian security forces and communities perceived as a threat to their own homeland demands.

The Bodos, who number around 200,000, wanted a separate state (some Bodo groups want this separate state within India, others outside it) because the Nagas, who are half their number, have one. The Kukis want a separate state in Manipur (but the demand encompasses even Kuki inhabited areas of Burma and Bangladesh) because their ethnic cousins, the Mizos have a state to themselves. Many smaller tribes or ethnic groups also want separate territorial identities in the form of autonomous councils or autonomous states because they are uncomfortable with the generic identities they were evolving into or which was imposed on them, and because many of them have strong historical memories of their own pre-colonial kingdoms and want to recreate homelands with those boundaries in mind.

So, the Bodos, the Lalungs, the Rabhas and the Mishings, who were the sword-arm of Assam's anti-foreigner agitation in the 1980s, all want separate states now. They are uncomfortable being clubbed into an Assamese identity that does not recognize their distinct origins. Unless the Assamese nationality formation process is reinvigorated to accommodate the dual identity of the tribe and the nationality (a Lalung or Mishing will not be uncomfortable with the broader Assamese identity if he is able to assert his tribal identity within it), many other tribes already assimilated into the Asomiya (*or* Assamese) identity, may start asking for separate homelands.

That would be disastrous for the political stability and administrative viability, and perhaps also for the economy of the North East.

TYPES OF DISPLACEMENT IN NORTH EAST INDIA

North East India has witnessed displacement both for development-induced reasons and also as a result of ethno-religious strife. If development-related displacement was caused by state policy, conflict-related displacement was caused by battling ethnicities, which saw ethnic cleansing as part of their strategy to justify the creation of a separate administrative entity. On most occasions, the displaced population crossed into a neighbouring state, where the local population was more friendly and the government more welcoming, at least initially. However, when the host and recipient states were ruled by different political parties, with different power equations *vis-à-vis* the federal government in Delhi, the issue of displacement became a complex political, rather than remain a simple humanitarian issue. And solving the crisis became as difficult as in a refugee situation (more legally speaking) involving two or more countries.

The states have often used displacement issues to score political points against each other. The Centre has not been far behind. When thousands of Reang tribal refugees crossed into Tripura, the state's Left government blamed Mizoram's Congress government for failing to check 'Mizo parochial elements'. India's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party-led government promptly denounced the Mizoram government for backing 'missionaries who were trying to forcibly convert the Hindu Reangs'. The BJP's political cousin, the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh or the RSS, rushed huge quantum of aid to the Reangs in the camps of Tripura in an attempt to use them to secure a foothold in Christian-dominated Mizoram. Upset with the Centre's attitude, Mizoram's former Chief Minister Lalthanhawla warned Delhi: 'I want the new government to maintain the secular character of the Constitution, but if they want to destabilise a small state like ours, it is up to them, but they will pay a heavy price' (Interview with *North East Daily* in Delhi, 9 April 1998).

The Congress government in 1987 reportedly went to the extent of arming the Bodos to destabilize the Assam government. In 1993, the

Bodos were finally granted an autonomous council, but an agreement could not be reached with the Assam government on its boundaries and the number of villages it was supposed to get. It took a whole decade to finally work out and implement an elaborate autonomy arrangement for the Bodos resulting in the creation of a Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Council that has gone through elections in 2005. In the meantime, Bodo militants resorted to massive violence against all non-Bodo communities to ensure a majority in areas of their perceived homeland that was heavily populated by non-Bodos. In the pre-1993 phase of the Bodo movement, no community was specifically targeted. Symbols of the Assam government, like the police and the transport network, were attacked. But that changed after 1993, leading to deaths of hundreds of non-Bodos and also Bodos in retaliatory raids. At the peak of the ethnic cleansing in 1997–98, there were more than 240,000 internally displaced people in western Assam—mostly Bengali Hindus and Muslims and 'Adivasis' but many Bodos as well. The number is still around 70,000 after the violence first started in a big way.

But as of now, all displacement of populations within an area like the North East is treated as internal to the nation-state. So all displaced persons would be treated as IDPs, but the concept of 'internal refugee' (meaning displaced persons who may not have crossed the frontiers of nations once uprooted but have crossed over from one state to another in a federal setting) may be considered to define the grey area between the transnational refugee and the internally displaced.

The North East Indian states have seen five types of displacement: (*a*) displacement caused by developmental projects, like the Dumbur Hydel Project, which uprooted and displaced at least 5,000 tribal families in Tripura; (*b*) displacement caused by government design, like the massive relocation of Mizo population during the regrouping of villages by the Indian army to tackle the insurrection unleashed by the Mizo National Front (MNF); (*c*) displacement caused by natural calamities like floods and earthquakes; (*d*) displacement caused by takeover of land by migrating communities; and (*e*) last but not the least, displacement caused by ethnic or religious strife, belatedly marked by systematic ethnic cleansing.

The quantification of displacement caused by development-induced projects or by natural calamities is incomplete, except in certain telling cases like the Dumbur Hydel Project, to which there was substantial tribal resistance in Tripura, but to which the erstwhile Congress government of the state paid no heed. Statistics regarding land alienation are also incomplete. A large number of recruits to the tribal guerrilla forces in the state are second, or at times, third generation victims of the displacement caused by the Dumbur project. I have long argued that, for the sake of long-term ethnic reconciliation, the Dumbur Hydel Project, which now produces only 7–8 MW of electricity, but which submerges an area where almost the whole of Tripura's tribal landless population can be gainfully resettled, should be dismantled and the state should look to its considerable reserves of natural gas to set up new power plants.

The United Liberation Front of Asom or the ULFA is most popular in areas where displacement and impoverishment due to natural calamities like floods are heaviest and where the government relief efforts are poor and slow to reach. The ULFA has, for instance, tried to mobilize peasants who have lost their lands to oil exploration projects through fronts. No wonder, its strongest popular base is in areas where the ravages of the annual floods are at its worst or where oil companies and tea plantations have thrived, but with little direct benefit to the local population.

Land alienation is considered to be one of the major causes of ethnic unrest and tribal resentment in the North East, but statistics produced by the land revenue departments of the state governments or by research institutes have been incomplete. In all these three situations, there is no definite point of time from where one could say the displacement started on a scale large enough to merit notice, though thousands have suffered internal displacement in North East, somewhat silently. But consciousness on the need to prevent such displacement in the future has grown in the region. Khasi tribesmen in Meghalaya's Domiosiat region successfully resisted uranium mining by India's Atomic Minerals Division in the 1990s, when they discovered it could bring to their area untold misery through disease, death and environmental degradation like in Jadugoda, India's only uranium mining area located in the state of Bihar (now Jharkhand).

Sustained agitation by Hmar tribespeople and by some other ethnic groups forced the governments of Manipur and Mizoram to resist the 1500 MW Tipaimukh Hydel Project. Only after the Assam government and Delhi gave definite commitments to bear the cost of rehabilitation did Manipur and Mizoram agree to allow the project to take off.

As far relocation of populations as part of counter-insurgency strategy, what happened in Mizoram in 1966–69, affecting at least 150,000 peasants, is not going to be possible now. Even the army admits it will be far too difficult for them to move populations, with so much human rights auditing around. The presence of the National Human Rights Commission (which has intervened in at least two situations capable of creating internal displacement, like in the case of the Chakmas and Hajongs in Arunachal Pradesh and the Reangs who fled Mizoram into Tripura) is also going to deter state governments or the army from undertaking such preposterous steps.

RETRIBALIZATION, NEW STATES AND ETHNIC CLEANSING

The worst cases of internal displacement in North East India have been those caused by ethnic strife since the 1960s. The first cases of such displacement were reported from Assam, when thousands of Bengalis fled the Brahmaputra valley during the 'Bongal Kheda' (drive away the Bengalis) agitation in the early 1960s. According to one estimate, nearly half a million Bengalis fled from Assam's Brahmaputra valley into neighbouring West Bengal and Tripura or to Assam's Bengali-dominant Barak valley. But the anti-Bengali riots of 1960 were somewhat disorganized. Since the 1980s, ethnic cleansing has become much more systematic in the North East and has been the major cause of large-scale internal displacement.

When the North East was reorganized in 1972 and new tribal states like Meghalaya were created; New Delhi did not realize it was opening the proverbial pandora's box. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had kept the North East outside the purview of the country's state reorganization process on linguistic lines, mindful of

its enormous diversities. But a year before his death, Nehru, smarting under the debacle of the war with China, gave full-fledged statehood to Nagaland. Like Kashmir, Nagaland also got special protected status. That led to more, though not always violent, demands for statehoods and homelands. In the late 1960s, with separatist campaigns spreading like prairie fires to ever new areas of the North East, Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi rounded off a successful military campaign in East Pakistan (that at least momentarily denied a major foreign sanctuary to the North East Indian rebels) by creating more full-fledged states like Meghalaya. Indira's son Rajiv Gandhi sealed the process by granting full statehood to Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh.

Each of these new states grew around one, two or, in some cases, three dominant tribes. These dominant tribes, who had agitated against so-called Assamese domination now sought to extend very similar domination over other smaller tribes. That, in turn, created more demands for new states of autonomous councils. The new tribal states were much more intolerant in dealing with minority issues than had been the case in Assam. In states like Meghalaya, the first targets for eviction were the Bengalis, who controlled the jobs, the businesses and the urban properties in Shillong. The Khasis, the dominant tribe, saw control over Shillong as crucial to its control over the new tribal state. So, Khasi youth organizations unleashed systematic violence, targeting the Bengalis, who started fleeing to Assam on their way to West Bengal.

That process continues. Bengalis, who were the key figures in Meghalaya's administration, politics, services and business, are involved in a silent pullout from the state, unable to bear the collective pressure of youth violence and a state policy that seeks to deny jobs or educational opportunities to their children. Open the pages of the *Shillong Times* or the *Meghalaya Guardian* newspapers any morning and you will find Bengalis offering their properties for sale at throwaway rates. Those left behind have to face attacks, particularly during their leading festival, the Durga Puja. In the 1980s, other non-tribal minorities in Meghalaya, like the Nepalis and the Biharis, also faced similar attacks. In Tripura also, the Bengalis—first the Hindus but now also the Muslims—have come under attack.

According to one estimate put forward by the state's Congress party, more than 120,000 Bengalis have displaced due to tribal guerrilla attacks and frequent massacres since the first big one at Mandai (West Tripura) in 1980, in which 324 people were killed. More than 4,000 people, mostly Bengalis have been killed or kidnapped for ransom by tribal guerrilla groups like the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) or the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) during the last few years. Tripura's agriculture minister Badal Choudhury had alleged that the rebels were deliberately trying to clear the state's tribal areas autonomous district council area of Bengalis, so that they can intensify their demand for a separate state (*Tripura Times* 12 November 1999). The ATTF and the NLFT have both issued 'quit notices' to the Bengali settlers, the ATTF going to the extent of declaring an ethnic cleansing programme called 'Operation Roukhala' (drive away) in 1997.

But unlike in Meghalaya, where there was hardly any instance of Bengali retaliation, in Tripura the Bengalis have retaliated. Sporadic retaliations have been reported from rural areas—after every tribal rebel attack, angry Bengalis have set fire to tribal villages or lynched tribals. In August, a Bengali militant group, the United Bengali Liberation Force (UBLF) was formed. The chairman, Bijon Basu, has now appealed to Bangladesh and political parties in West Bengal to support them with funds and arms to 'preserve the undivided existence of the great Bengali race.' The UBLF has since attacked tribals travelling in public transport and even killed tribal officials. One attack, in the heart of the state's capital Agartala, in which a tribal sub-divisional officer was killed, has created panic in the state. The tribals living in Agartala and other urban locations of the state dominated by the Bengalis are feeling insecure—and what began as a one-way exodus might well become a both-way exodus, with Bengalis fleeing the hills and outlying villages and the tribals fleeing the towns.

The Bengali Hindus and Muslims, who control prime agricultural land (that they cleared and worked in) and retail businesses, are also the prime targets of ethnic cleansing in the Bodo areas of Assam. But in the Bodo areas, the Santhals, Mundas and Oraons, popularly called 'tea tribes' because they were brought to work in Assam's

tea plantations, have come under increasing attacks by the Bodos. After the creation of the non-functioning Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC), the Bodos have systematically tried to evict other minority groups from BAC area or those areas claimed by it and not parted with by the Assam government. But the minorities have started hitting back.

There have been four distinct waves of violence against the non-Bodos. In June–July 1993, Bengali Muslims were the prime targets of Bodo attacks in the districts of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon. Between 18,000 to 20,000 people belonging to nearly 2,200 families were affected in nearly thirty villages. Nearly 13,000 of those displaced still remained in ten camps (eight in Kokrajhar and two in Bongaigaon), though Assam government officials told me during a visit to the area that these camps would be closed within 15 days 'as normalcy had returned'. The second wave of Bodo violence was in July 1994. Again Bengali Muslims, but some Bengali Hindus as well, were the prime targets. Nearly 65,000 people belonging to just over 6,000 families were affected. Sixty two camps were set up, but they had all been closed down and the Assam government claimed all the inmates had been rehabilitated. Whether they have retained their ancestral lands remains to be ascertained. At least one case of alternate relocation of the victims of Bodo violence was reported in May 1998 when the Assam government tried to resettle 4,000 Bengali families in Chakerbasti area of Lumding reserve forest in Central Assam—a move that was opposed by local Bengalis.

The third and fourth waves of violence against non-Bodos occurred in May 1996 and May 1998. This time the tea tribes (Santhals, Oraons and Mundas), whose origins are in Central India, were the prime targets. In May 1996, 61 camps were opened in Kokrajhar district, as nearly 115,000 tea tribals fled their villages. But many tea tribals, though their villages were burnt down and their near and dear ones killed, remained behind to fight and protect their lands. Assam government officials say the attacks by Bodos, in which more than 200 Santhals, Oraons and Mundas were killed, elicited some retaliation, as the 'tea tribes' are also known to be quite militant. But the traditional bows and arrows and machetes used by the 'tea tribes' were no match for the AK-47 and AK-56 rifles used by the rebels

of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). Nearly 30 Bodo villagers were killed in retaliation.

However, the Bodo attacks in May 1998 did provoke substantial retaliation. Some militant outfits like the Cobra Force had been formed by the 'tea tribes' by then. Nearly 300 people died—but this time, at least one-fifth of those killed, and also those displaced, were said to be the Bodos. Around 231,989 tea tribals and Bodos fled into 67 camps of Kokrajhar and 15,238 into eight camps in Dhubri district. At least half of them still remain in these camps. Tea tribal leaders like Ganesh Murmu of the Raj Dishom Manjhi Baisi group, however, allege that at least 1,000 Santhals, Oraons and Mundas were killed and another 3,000 died of malnutrition in the camps since May 1996. Murmu alleges that 350 revenue villages have been affected by the violence. At the peak of violence in western Assam, there were 239,076 people in camps set up for the internally displaced. After the Bodo settlement that led to the creation of the Council, many have gone back to their villages but more than 70,000 non-Bodos still remain behind in the camps.

Both in Tripura and in the Bodo areas of Assam, large-scale violence leading to substantial internal displacement started after the government decided to form autonomous councils for the tribes-people. The tribal leaders, underground and overground alike, admit that they intend to convert these district councils into full-fledged states. In Tripura, the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS) has been joined by other tribal parties in demanding the creation of an autonomous state under Article 244 of the Indian constitution. The All Bodo Students' Union and the Bodo Peoples Action Committee have already resumed the movement for a separate state—they say the Bodoland Autonomous Council has been a non-functioning one. If the Meghalaya experience is anything to go by, the non-tribals apprehend they would face greater eviction and displacement if the tribals managed to secure full-fledged statehoods for their autonomous councils.

Unlike in Assam or Tripura, in Manipur, the Nagas and the Kukis have become involved in a fierce feud, in which more than 800 people have died and nearly 75,000 rendered homeless since 1992. The majority Meiteis, who formed the ruling clans of Manipur

before the British conquest, have largely been unaffected by the blood-letting that peaked in 1993 with the beheading of 87 Kukis by armed Nagas in Zopui village.

The Kukis have also fought a bloody feud with the Paites, earlier believed to be their sub-tribe, since June 1997. In ten months, 214 Kukis and Paites were killed and 5,000 houses were destroyed as rebel militias fought each other. The Kukis were also involved in two phases of rioting with the Tamil settlers in Moreh in 1995–96 in which more than 30 people were killed. At the root of the fight between the Kukis and these other groups was the desire to retain control over the lucrative contraband trade through the border town of Moreh on the frontier of Burma. In fact, the Naga-Kuki feud began with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) imposing 'taxes' on traders in Moreh. Since the Kukis had controlled the trade through Moreh in view of their numerical superiority in the area, they hit back at the Nagas. As the NSCN and its militia, the Naga Lim Guards attacked Kukis in large numbers, the Kukis, many of them former soldiers and policemen, formed the Kuki National Army (KNA) and raised the demand for a separate Kukiland encompassing Kuki-dominated areas of North East India and Burma.

The NSCN alleges that the KNA was backed by the Indian security forces. Initially, the KNA did accompany Indian army columns in raids on NSCN hideouts, acting as guides. But once the army began to adopt a relatively neutral attitude, the KNA started attacking Indian security forces, primarily for snatching weapons. With Nagas fighting Kukis, Kukis fighting Paites and Tamils, and the majority Meiteis resenting the frequent NSCN-sponsored highway blockades that sent prices of essential commodities skyrocketing, Manipur in the mid-1990s looked like becoming India's Lebanon or Bosnia, with the entire society divided on ethnic lines. So much so, that government ministers and church leaders came out in open support of militias belonging to their community, even lending out jeeps and official cars to them. Manipur's governor, retired Lieutenant-General V.K. Nayyar was so upset with intelligence reports that the Chief Minister Rishang Keishing (a Naga) had ordered delivery of a huge consignment of police uniforms to the NSCN, that he recommended dismissal of the Chief Minister.

But by the beginning of 1997, Delhi had started negotiations with the NSCN, which, now, could not carry weapons under the terms of the ceasefire. So, the NSCN had to look for ways to avoid armed conflict, because that would, affect the cease-fire with Indian forces. The KNA also needed, like the NSCN and Lim Guards, a breathing spell. Ceasefires were reached between the warring sides—and in the case of Kukis and Paites, community leaders even signed an accord, watched by rebel leaders of either side. So far so good, but with the real issues behind the disputes—conflicting homeland claims, control over land, trade routes and state power—still simmering, the conflicts could erupt again.

THE SILENT PUSHOUTS

Unlike the fierce blood-letting in Manipur that occasionally spilled over to neighbouring states with some Naga and Kuki population, the Chakmas and Hajongs in Arunachal Pradesh and the Reangs in Mizoram were evicted through violence. The Chakmas and Hajongs, who are also tribals, migrated to India in two phases: immediately after the Partition and then after the installation of the Kaptai Dam in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (now in Bangladesh) in 1964. They settled in Tripura and Mizoram, but about 30,000 of them were settled in the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), which subsequently became Arunachal Pradesh. The locals never accepted them and have always argued that they were meant to live in their state for only 20 years. Arunachal Pradesh is the largest state in the North East but with a population of barely half 50,000. As the Chakmas-Hajongs grew in numbers (believed to be 65,000 now), the principal tribes, Adis and Nishis, began to feel threatened. In a few years, they reckoned the Chakmas would become the single largest tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, and if they become Indian citizens, they would become the major power holder group.

There is absolute consensus amongst the tribes and political parties in Arunachal Pradesh that the Chakmas and the Hajongs will have to leave. In 1994–95, the State Government started pressurizing the Chakmas and the Hajongs to leave. Assam's Chief Minister Hiteswar

Saikia ordered curfew along the border with Arunachal Pradesh to prevent the Chakmas and the Hajongs from crossing into Assam. But Chakma groups estimate that nearly 3,000 Chakmas and some Hajongs fled from Arunachal Pradesh and settled down in Assam to escape frequent violence or threats of erupting violence. These groups, like the World Chakma Organization, say a 'silent exodus' is still on and Chakmas and Hajongs are leaving Arunachal Pradesh in small numbers every year. India's failure to grant them citizenship has aggravated their sense of insecurity and the fierce local reaction to any such suggestion has unnerved the Chakmas and Hajongs. Sporadic violence has also been reported against Chakma settlements and government officials have been involved in encouraging economic blockades of Chakma inhabited areas. Belatedly, the State Government offered monetary inducements to those Chakmas willing to leave. But such moves have only been partially successful.

Unlike the Chakmas, the Reangs in Mizoram started fleeing to Tripura in large groups, several thousands at a time, after armed Mizos attacked their settlements in parts of western Mizoram in October 1997. By the end of the year, more than 40,000 Reangs had fled into neighbouring Tripura. Hundreds died in makeshift camps where medicine, food and even shelter were scarce. Several rounds of meetings were held between Tripura and Mizoram officials, even the Home Ministers of the two states met several times. The Reang leaders demanded protection by Central paramilitary forces, adequate rehabilitation on return, a guarantee against future attacks by Mizos and an end of attempted conversion from Hinduism or animism to Christianity. And a Reang rebel group, the Bru National Liberation Front, started demanding creation of an autonomous council for the Reangs.

The Reangs clearly suffer from a sense of insecurity. Mizo leaders—in fact, successive Chief Ministers like Lalthanhawla of the Congress and Zoramthanga of the Mizo National Front—have said the Reangs hail from Tripura, that they had settled in Mizoram over the past few decades and had no right to make political demands like asking for an autonomous council on the lines of those that exist for the Chakmas, the Pawis and the Lakhers. An attempt by the Mizo National Front government to abolish the Chakma district council in

1986 was stalled when New Delhi intervened. On the day, he made Mizoram a 'full fledged' Indian state, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi told a rally in the state's capital Aizawl that 'much as Mizos expect magnanimity as a small ethnic group in a vast country like India, they should be prepared to extend similar treatment to still smaller minorities like the Chakmas.' But Mizoram's ruling governments have used their administrative machinery to disenfranchise thousands of Chakmas and Reangs—a former state assembly member, Satyapriyo Chakma even found his name deleted from the electoral rolls in 1995.

So, the North East has witnessed at least seven major cases of strife-induced internal displacement in more than 50 years of the Indian Republic. They are as follows: (*a*) the displacement of Bengalis from Assam (particularly Bodo areas) and Meghalaya; (*b*) the displacement of Bengalis from Tripura; (*c*) the displacement of 'tea tribes' in western Assam; (*d*) the displacement of Reangs from Mizoram; (*e*) the displacement of Nagas, Kukis and Paites in Manipur; and (*f*) the displacement of Chakmas from Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. Except in Manipur, the displacement has spilled over to other states, and at least twice to neighbouring countries (when some Paites fled into Burma's Tamu township in 1997 and when some Bengalis fled into Bangladesh the same year to avoid tribal violence in Khowai).

The process of displacement started with violence aimed at creating distinct administrative entities. The level of violence usually increased after the creation of such units, as dominant communities sought to strengthen their grip on an area they saw as their legitimate homeland. The federal government has generally intervened to prevent displacement, to provide security and humanitarian assistance for the displaced to rehabilitate them once they returned.

In most of the six cases listed above, the government has been rarely successful in its efforts to either restore law and order or ethnic harmony or maintain adequate levels of relief supplies and ensure rehabilitation. It has failed to stem the tide of Bengali displacement in Tripura and control the Bodo insurrectionary activities that led to large scale displacement of non-Bodo populations in western Assam; despite several interventions by the Home Ministry, the government has failed to ensure the return of the Reang refugees from Tripura

to Mizoram; and has failed to prevent the ethnic relocation of populations in Manipur in the wake the bloody feuds and also has failed to grant citizenship to the Chakmas and the Hajongs and thus guarantee them a safe future in Arunachal Pradesh.

THE OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

The Bengali angst is already resulting in, perhaps for the first time in the North East, the formation of resistance groups. Militant groups like the United Bengali Liberation Force in Tripura and the Bengali Tiger Force in western Assam were set up, though their raison d'etre has suffered after the splits in the Tripura rebel groups that weakened them and the Bodo Accord in Assam. Despite their earlier religious animosity, Bengali Hindus and Muslims have come together to strengthen these groups because they perceive a common threat.

The 'tea tribes' have already set up their own militant groups like the Cobra Force, which has begun to resort to kidnappings and extortion, ambushes and raids on Bodo villages on the pattern of the Bodo rebels. The Reangs have their Bru National Liberation Front that has received weapons from ethnic kinsmen in Bangladesh. The Chakmas do not have an armed group in India, but remnants of the Shanti Bahini are still left over in India, though most of them returned to the Chittagong Hill Tracts after the December 1997 peace accord. The Shanti Bahini remnants could easily supply the nucleus for a future militant force. The target communities are preparing to fight back. Those who have been on the offensive so far are also consolidating their strength. Long-term solutions based on harmony of ethnic interests have been put forward neither by the federal governments nor by the states, who are often at loggerheads with each other on displacement issues.

The federal government in India has so far discouraged foreign NGOs or multilateral organizations like the UNHCR from intervening even in standard refugee situations, let alone on internal displacement issues. The UNHCR was kept away from the camps sheltering nearly 60,000 Chakma and other tribal refugees, who had fled into the North East Indian state of Tripura from Bangladesh's

Chittagong Hill Tracts to escape attacks by Bangladesh security forces and Bengali re-settlers between 1986 and 1989. With the signing of the peace accord between the new Awami league government in Bangladesh and the rebel leadership of the Parbattya Chattogram Jansanghati Samity (PCJSS), almost all those Chakma and other tribal refugees returned to Chittagong Hill Tracts. But for number of years, the UNHCR was not allowed anywhere near the camps in Tripura because (*a*) India believed in a bilateral solution of the refugee problem with Bangladesh; (*b*) the UNHCR intervention was seen as potentially capable of internationalizing the whole Chittagong Hill Tracts issue and would have adversely reflected on India's not-so-well-known backing to the PCJSS and its armed wing, the Shanti Bahini; and (*c*) Delhi was uncomfortable in letting UN organizations into the North East, an area where entry of foreigners, even tourists, was almost totally barred (unless special permission from the Home Ministry was secured) until recently, and where such entry is still quite restricted in the four states.

The levels of deaths due to malnutrition and disease has been quite high in Chakma refugee camps in Tripura (10,870 deaths in eleven years, evened out only by a 'baby boom' that led to just over 9,000 new births). Deaths from similar causes are quite high in Reang refugee camps (official figure: 417, but unofficial estimates place it at thrice the number) in Tripura or the Santhal-Munda-Oraon or Bengali refugee camps in western Assam (887 according to official estimates, 3,000 by unofficial estimates). So, here is a region with a strong case for UN humanitarian assistance for the IDPs. Lately, some state governments that resent receiving heavy lDP flows, have welcomed foreign NGOs and might be welcoming UNHCR and other UN bodies. The entry of some foreign NGOs like the Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF) in some states of North East is encouraging.

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Development, Displacement and the Right to Life[1]

WALTER FERNANDES AND SANJAY BARBORA

The Supreme Court judgement on the Narmada and the contempt proceedings against Arundhati Roy have reopened the debate on 'Development-induced Displacement', particularly on the number and type of displaced persons (DP) or deprived of their livelihood without physical relocation of Project-Affected People (PAP). Also questioned in the debate is the eminent domain of the state and the assumption of the judgement that the main issue in displacement is rehabilitation. At stake is their right to life with dignity enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution of India. Development being planned, the impoverishment and marginalization caused by it are avoidable. Instead, the people are deprived of their sustenance in the name of national development without their consent and no provision made to begin life anew. The problem in its present form began in the colonial age and has intensified after 1951.

It has become relevant to the North East because the focus of people displacing schemes has shifted to this region. Of 48 massive dams being planned, 10 are being finalized and six have received environmental clearance in 2001. They are presented as basic for development, since investment has been low in the region during the past several decades. In fact, they are meant to bring some income to the region by selling power to other states. These and other schemes raise questions about the people's right to life with dignity.

Moreover, defence considerations have always influenced the course of the region's economic development. The fact that militarization is taken as 'normal' has much to do with the manner in which the dominant forces in the national polity define development.

In this context we shall look at the state of displacement or deprivation in India as a whole and see whether what has happened in the rest of the country will repeat itself in this region as well. Is it a deviation from the constitutional imperatives or is people's marginalization a norm? One is left with the impression that the latter is the case because instead of dealing with marginalization, the Central Government is planning to amend the Land Acquisition Act 1894 (LAQ) to make acquisition of land for private companies easier. But the rehabilitation policy is yet to see the light of the day. In order to grasp the issues raised, we shall discuss displacement with special focus on the North East.

DEFINING THE DISPLACED

The displaced include voluntary or involuntary migrants, refugees of wars and of natural or man-made disasters and process-induced migrants caused by economic or technological changes, for example, by the introduction of trawlers in fishing. We exclude them and limit ourselves to development-induced DPs/PAPs. Second, we do not reject any development but only that which impoverishes and marginalizes the weak to the benefit of another class. We believe that those who pay the price of development have a right to its first benefits. Third, we include both the DPs and the PAPs. Development literature rarely mentions the latter simply, because they are not displaced though they lose all or part of their *patta* land or community property resources (CPRs) that are their livelihood. Their loss can be worse than that of the DPs who are resettled because they lose their source of livelihood with no possibility of resettlement even when the project has a provision for it. They only get meagre compensation for *patta* land but none for the CPRs (Ramanathan 1999).

Worse than that is the 'indirect DPs' who move out 'voluntarily' because of the deterioration of their livelihood or environmental degradation. For example, when fly ash from cement factories or

thermal power stations destroys land around them or expansions, noise and air pollution from mines affect them and they have no choice but to move out. But they are not even included among the PAPs (Ganguly Thukral 1989). Their number is substantial but we too exclude them from our study because it is difficult to make an estimate. We deal only with the project DPs/PAPs. Being planned, it is possible for the project authorities to prevent its negative impact on the DPs/PAPs. In reality, the project rarely pays attention to this aspect. It deprives people of their livelihood without their consent and resettles very few DPs. As such it is a human rights issue and we need to study its implications.

CREATING A DATABASE

An important issue in the debate is the absence of a reliable database on the number and type of DPs/PAPs and the state of their rehabilitation. No rehabilitation is possible without it but one has to depend on estimates. Arundhati Roy in her article published in *Outlook* speaks of 56 million displaced by large dams based on the average worked out by Indian Institute of Public Administration. Surjit Bhalla (2001) gives a ridiculously low figure of 1,360 DPs per large dam. We did an estimate of 21.3 million DPs/PAPs between 1951 and 1990 (Fernandes 1998: 251). Till date, we have done data-based studies on all displacement during 1951–95 in Orissa (Fernandes and Asif 1997), Andhra Pradesh (Fernandes et al. 2001), Goa (Fernandes and Naik 1999), Jharkhand (Ekka and Asif 2000) and Kerala (Muricken et al. 2000), and have preliminary data from West Bengal and two other states.[2] Though they do not include high displacement states like Chattisgarh and despite some gaps and the need to revise the figures of DPs/PAPs upwards, we consider their data reliable since they are well documented and systematic.

The studies were done in three phases. We divided the projects into water resources, defence establishments, transport and communications, power plants, industries, mines, human resource development and others. In states where tourism is important, we added this category. In West Bengal, much land was acquired for refugee rehabilitation. So we added that category too. In Phase I, we studied all the

land acquisition gazette notifications during 1951–95 under the LAQ and other state and central laws. We also made a list of all: West Bengal has more than 45,000 of them and Tamil Nadu over 80,000. This phase also involved the projects in the state, in the private and public sector, in order to see the extent of land received by all the parties. In Phase II, we studied the land records in the district collectorates and supplemented it with data from other studies, the documentation centres and knowledgeable persons. The third phase was primary data collection from a representative set of projects according to their type, age and district divided into 'advanced', 'medium' and 'backward'.

Phase I gave us data on the total land acquired. At least 6 per cent of the state's landmass has been acquired or between 15 and 20 million ha in India as a whole, more than half of it CPRs, including 25 per cent forest land. In Phase II access to land records was not easy. Many collectorate staff did not cooperate with us. We fill the gaps by extrapolating from the data available. We supplemented it with the sources mentioned above. This phase gave us data on the land acquired, the compensation paid, the number and caste/tribe of the DPs/PAPs, the number resettled and other project data such as cost and time overrun. A representative sample of DPs/PAPs was interviewed. In Orissa we interviewed 800 persons from 11 projects, in AP 635 from 14, in Kerala 700 from 15, in Goa 90 from 4, in Jharkhand 800 from 18, and in West Bengal 724 from 14 projects.

THE DEBATE ON THE NUMBERS

A lesson we learnt from these studies is that our estimate has to be revised upwards. These six states including West Bengal have created around 10 million DPs/PAPs during 1951–95, or about 50 per cent of 21.3 million given in our estimate. Over 5 million of them have been created by the construction of dams. So the figure of 16.4 million DPs/PAPs of dams given in our estimate has to be revised. For every 10 DPs, dams cause 6 PAPs. So we tend to put the number of dam DPs/PAPs at 40 million till today, 25 million of them DPs and 15 million PAPs. We arrived at a figure of 1.25 million DPs/PAPs of industry. Andhra Pradesh and Orissa account for half that number.

We had put the transport and communications DPs/PAPS at 500,000. Orissa and Andhra Pradesh account for that. Our figure for mines was 2.35 million. Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Jharkhand account for more than 1 million.

Based on these studies and preliminary data from others, we tend to put the numbers of all the project DPs/PAPs during 1951–95 at not less than 50 million. This number is thrice as much as the estimated 15 million transferred between India and the two wings of Pakistan at the time of Partition in 1947. The country is yet to recover from that trauma. But despite the enormity of the problem, the millions deprived of their livelihood in the name of national development have not entered India's national consciousness. Besides, case studies indicate that most official figures are under-estimates. For example, by official count 110,000 persons were displaced by the Hirakud dam in Orissa. Researchers put their number at 180,000 (Pattanaik et al. 1987: 53–58). The Farakka Super Thermal Plant in West Bengal has officially affected none. But the World Bank (1994) speaks of 63,325 DPs/PAPs. The estimates for Sriramsagar in Andhra Pradesh range from 100,000 to 140,000 (Guggenheim 1990: 14). Many more such cases can be given.

In this context we question the number given by Arundhati Roy, Surjit Bhalla and IIPA. They put all the 'large dams' above 15 metres into one category. To be realistic one has to divide them into major and medium according to their irrigation potential (IP). Displacement is linked to land and IP is based on the land submerged. By doing that we realized that fewer than 300 of India's 4,200 large dams are major, each of them affecting between 25,000 and 250,000 persons. At least 15 of them have displaced more than 100,000 each. The remaining large dams are medium and they affect 400 to 6,000 persons each. So, one cannot accept a single average for all the large dams.

STATE OF REHABILITATION

The problem of low compensation and lack of resettlement is immense. The few policies that exist speak of R&R (resettlement and rehabilitation) as though they were identical. In fact, resettlement is one-time physical relocation with or without other support like

jobs or income generation schemes. So it concerns only the DPs. Rehabilitation is a long process involving replacement of the cultural and social systems and economic base of the DPs/PAPs including the CPRs, psychological preparation to deal with the new society and economy—they come face to face with and other components meant to ensure that their lifestyle is better after than before the project since they pay the price of development (Cernea 2000: 12–13). It concerns both the DPs and PAPs.

The studies justified our estimate that a third of the DPs were resettled. In Orissa, 35.27 per cent of the DPs during 1951–95 were resettled (Fernandes and Asif 1997: 135), 28.82 per cent in Andhra Pradesh (Fernandes et al. 2001: 87) and 33.28 per cent in Goa during 1965–95 (Fernandes and Naik 1999: 57–58). The worst are Kerala, West Bengal and Jharkhand (Ekka and Asif 2000). Kerala and West Bengal, said to be high on human development have resettled the DPs of a dozen schemes each. Besides, one of West Bengal's biggest acquisitions of land is for refugee rehabilitation. The state enacted a draconian law in 1948 to ensure quick acquisition for it. The local people were displaced to resettle the refugees but not rehabilitated.

Besides, resettlement is higher in the post-1980 World Bank funded projects or in those in which the people agitated than those before it. For example, in the 1970s the Ukai dam in Gujarat did not have an R&R package, but there is one for Sardar Sarovar. In West Bengal projects like the Budge Budge Thermal Plant and the Kalyani Industrial Estate that experienced agitation or the World Bank funded Farakka Super Thermal Plant have resettlement schemes. But the DPs of other massive schemes like the Mayurakshi dam and Teesta Barrage have been left to fend for themselves. In Jharkhand, the World Bank funded Subarnarekha has resettlement scheme but not the Kutku dam of the 1980s. In Orissa the World Bank funded Upper Indravati and Rengali dams have resettlement schemes but not Upper Kolab built around the same time. The Bank is interested in getting land without encumbrances for the big companies but it speaks of rehabilitation to satisfy the human rights activists in the West. But more than years after independence, India that swears by *swadeshi* resettles its citizens—displaced in the name of 'national development'—only when they agitate or when the World Bank tells her to do so.

Misery is its consequence. For example, some 30,000 of the 150,000 construction workers of the Asiad facilities in 1982 were slave labourers from Orissa and Chattisgarh (then Madhya Pradesh) brought to Delhi by labour contractors with promise of a job in Baghdad. Once in Delhi they were kept in concentration camp-like conditions with no hope of ever returning home. Hirakud and other projects had displaced them. Impoverished, they followed the contractor. Such persons form a big section of construction and brick kiln workers today. Bonded and child labour are common among them (Fernandes 1986). Impoverishment forces the DPs to keep their children away from school. Even in resettlement, low priority is given to these and other facilities. So their literacy status may even deteriorate as it did in the Salandi dam in the Keonjhar district of Orissa. It displaced people from around a town with a fairly high number of schools. Most children were attending them. They were resettled in a forest area. Several years passed before a school was built. Land given to the DPs was poor in quality with no irrigation though they were displaced for an irrigation dam. So their economic status deteriorated. By the time the school was built, poverty had forced their children to work for an income and they had lost the habit of going to school (Fernandes and Raj 1992: 157–159).

Another cause of impoverishment is the long time gap between displacement and resettlement. In most cases the DPs live in temporary shelters for two to four years. For example, among the few West Bengal projects that resettled their DPs, only the Budge Budge Thermal Power station resettled most of them within a year. In the others they had to wait for an average of two years. In Goa, the Salaulim dam was completed in the late 1980s but resettlement of its DPs was in progress at the time of our study in 1998. In Orissa, the Machkhund dam DPs were resettled a decade after displacement. The DPs of the Tungabhadra dam in AP were resettled five years after their displacement. That is the case with most projects all over India. That makes it impossible for the DPs to begin life anew.

DEPRIVAL OF JOBS

Basic to impoverishment is the absence of alternatives to the livelihood lost. Very few projects give jobs to the DPs/PAPs.

For example, in Andhra Pradesh, in our sample of 635 families, 27 were in the process of displacement or deprival. Of the remaining 608, availability of employment had declined from 509 (83.72 per cent) before the project to 253 (41.61 per cent) after it (Fernandes et al. 2001: 141). Very few of these jobs were given by the project. In Orissa, out of 266,500 families of DPs/PAPs for which we had got data, we have confirmation of one job given by the project to only 9,000 of them (Fernandes and Asif 1997: 137–39). In West Bengal, in our sample of 724 families, 125 (20 per cent) were given a permanent job each, most of them by two recent projects. No job was given in Goa and very few in Kerala.

Moreover, most jobs given to the tribals, particularly women, are unskilled, often on daily wages. For example, in West Bengal only eight permanent jobs were given to women. Of the 45 semi-skilled jobs, none went to the tribals or Dalits and only two were given to women. Six men and five women got temporary jobs. Ninety per cent of the jobs got by tribals in Andhra Pradesh were unskilled, often temporary. In Orissa, some tribals got semi-skilled jobs in the NALCO unit at Damanjodi, Koraput district because a voluntary agency trained them in some skills. Otherwise, all the skilled jobs go to persons from the dominant castes as we witnessed in the second NALCO unit, in the upper caste dominated Angul district. Some projects are ready to give technical training to the DPs/PAPs who have adequate educational qualifications. But even among the dominant castes, in most cases only boys study up to the high school. So girls even from these castes and boys and girls from the subalterns lose out (Fernandes and Raj 1992: 141–42).

The few R&R policies that exist are discriminatory from this perspective. For example, Coal India stipulates that a job be given for 3 acres of land acquired. In the case of matriculates in the 25 new mines being planned in the Palamau district of Jharkhand, it is reduced to two acres. So even in the tribal villages, sons of non-tribal Rajput landlords get these jobs. Besides, many lose their jobs after getting them because they have to be inserted into a new economy and society with a time frame and culture that is different from theirs. For example, a large number of DPs employed by the Rourkela Steel Plant in Orissa lost their jobs because of what was called drunkenness or indiscipline. In reality they had to make a

shift from an agricultural economy and time frame to an industrial discipline without any social or psychological preparation. Forced deprival is a trauma that is not dealt with. Their coping mechanism is drunkenness (Viegas 1992: 40–45).

Moreover, many families have more than one adult but are given only one job per family and almost always to a man considered the head of the family. Women, particularly tribal women, are deprived of the land and forests that were the source of their relatively high status and of economic utility. Once deprived of this livelihood they have to depend on the single salary of their husbands. If they get jobs outside the project, they are mostly daily unskilled ones. Many men who are given jobs as peons or maintenance staff in the project office refuse to allow their wives to take up these jobs because it is 'below the dignity of an office worker' to have their wives doing 'menial work' (Menon 1995). So women are reduced to being housewives alone from their earlier role of being contributors to the family economy. But their role as caretakers of the household remains unchanged. However, they have to buy even their basic needs like food that they used to get earlier from their land and forests. The men on the other hand, influenced by outsiders who come to the project, spend a substantial amount of their earning on clothes, entertainment and other trivia, thus leaving a relatively small amount for the woman to run the household. Malnutrition is its consequence (Fernandes and Raj 1992: 153–57).

The situation has deteriorated after globalization. 'Employment Adjustment', a euphemism for fewer jobs is an IMF conditionality. Mechanization is its main reason, the others being reduction or elimination of subsidies and portfolio investment. Till 1986 the T.N. Singh Formula 1967 stipulated that one job per family be given to those displaced by the public sector mines and industries. With mechanization reducing unskilled jobs the Bureau of Public Enterprises abandoned this formula in 1986. (MRD 1993: 4.3). Studies and field experience show its impact. For example, all the subsidiaries of Coal India Limited (CIL) together gave a job each to 11,901 (36.34 per cent) of the 32,751 families displaced in 1981–85 (Government of India 1985). In the mid-1980s, CIL began to mechanize its mines and to transfer employees to other mines

instead of giving jobs to its DPs. The impact is seen, among others, in the 25 mines being planned in the Upper Karanpura Valley of Jharkhand. If implemented they will displace 100,000 people—over 60 per cent of them being dalits and tribals. The first five mines gave a job each to only 638 (10.18 per cent) of the 6,265 families displaced till 1992 (BJA & NBJK 1993: 36). If traditional transport was used, the NALCO mines in the Koraput district of Orissa would have created 10,000 jobs. In the 1980s, the Upper Kolab dam in the district had deprived 50,000 persons of their livelihood. The NALCO Plant had displaced 6,000 people. Many of them would have been employed and their income would have created more jobs in the informal sector. But the mines are fully mechanized and have created a little over 300 skilled and semi-skilled jobs. All of them have gone to outsiders (Pattanaik and Panda 1992).

FAILURE TO REHABILITATE

Even the product of the project does not reach the DPs/PAPs. For example, persons displaced by irrigation dams like Mayurakshi and Teesta Barrage in West Bengal, Ukai in Gujarat, Kutku in Jharkhand have not been provided irrigation facilities. The Nagarjunasagar dam in Andhra Pradesh that resettled most of its DPs provided the facility four decades later. Upper Kolah in Orissa resettled 18 per cent of its DPs on dry and totally unproductive land. So, many of them left the colony within five years. As a result, the production of food grain declines. For example in West Bengal, the respondents of the projects studied other than the Digha Tourist Centre were growing 4,804 quintals of paddy before deprival. It has reduced to 2,985 quintals now. This is the case with other crops as well. In other words, jobs are not given and simultaneously food production declines. Impoverishment is a natural consequence.

We studied more than 100 projects only to assess their potential of making the DPs go beyond resettlement to rehabilitation. In the mid-1950s, around 20 per cent of the Maehkund dam DPs, Malkangiri district, Orissa, were given five acres of forest land each and some other material and asked to look after themselves. With no other

input they resettled themselves according to their former villages and recreated the system they had lost. At that time their region had no outside moneylenders, merchants and other exploiters. So they were able to develop their land without any interference. Till the time of our study in 1991 none had lost land. The DPs/PAPs of the Digha Tourist Centre, Midnapore district, West Bengal, were not resettled but occupied common land and developed it. They grew new crops to cater to the tourist resort. As a result they have improved their lifestyle with no inputs from the state. In Nagarjunasagar, the people are beginning to see some benefits four decades later. In most other projects, the situation of the DPs/PAPs has deteriorated. For example, in Andhra Pradesh, the income of only 30 respondents has improved after the project and that of most of the others has declined by 25 to 50 per cent and in some cases even more (Fernandes et al. 2001: 111–13).

The State views compensation as rehabilitation though it is given only for *patta* land and none for the CPRs, which is considered state property. Besides 'market price' is calculated on the basis of the registered price for three preceding years. It is well known, though not easy to document, that what is registered is rarely more than 40 per cent of what is paid. Land price is very low in the administratively neglected regions referred to as 'backward areas'. It makes compensation inadequate for the DPs/PAPs to begin life anew. For example, of the two NALCO units in Orissa built in the mid-1980s, the first is situated in the middle caste, medium farmer dominated Angul and the second in the tribal majority Koraput district. Only 18 per cent of the land acquired for the former was for common facilities, like schools, roads and tanks. But two-thirds of that acquired for the second plant was CPRs, like forests, pastures and other means of earning a livelihood. But compensation was paid only for *patta* land. Besides, in Angul they got an average of Rs 25,000 per acre but in Koraput it was Rs 2,700 for the very little private land owned (Fernandes and Raj 1992: 92). In Goa, the DPs of the Salaulim Dam approached the High Court demanding higher compensation and got it raised by about four times. But the Supreme Court reduced it by about half the original. The case took more than a decade. In the meantime, inflation and legal charges had eaten up the extra compensation they received (Fernandes and Naik 1999: 57).

LIMITED POLICIES AND EMINENT DOMAIN

Despite the enormity of the problem, India does not have a rehabilitation policy,[3] leave alone a law. So the DPs/PAPs cannot demand resettlement as a right. Maharashtra, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh (MP) have rehabilitation laws. Orissa, MP and Rajasthan have policies for irrigation DPs. The Karnataka law, passed in 1987, had to wait till 1994 for the President's assent. To the best of our knowledge, MP and Karnataka have not applied the law to any project. The public sector NTPC and Coal India policies promulgated in the 1990s depend mainly on self-employment or income generation, often without physical resettlement. Though called R&R they are different processes. The problems around displacement begin long before it manifests and continue for years after resettlement. Rehabilitation involves rebuilding their cultural, economic, psychological and social systems. This process is ignored in the R&R schemes. By and large, they ignore the PAPs though most of them are worse off than the DPs when resettled. They get only compensation for *patta* land and none for the CPRs. They stipulate that a job be given to land losers, most of them from dominant castes. The landless and CPR dependants, mostly Dalits and tribals, have to be satisfied with self-employment and income generation schemes limited to production and not marketing where exploitation is the greatest.

India has neither a national policy nor law. In 1985, a committee of the Ministry of Welfare that prepared a policy for tribal DPs, suggested that a national policy be prepared for all the DPs; that rehabilitation be integral to every project above a certain size in the public and the private sectors; that the policy should have legal authority and be binding on the government and the implementing authority (Government of India 1985). The Ministry of Rural Development formulated a draft in 1993 (MRD 1993) and revised it in 1994 (MRD 1994). In 1994–95 more than 1,500 activist groups joined thousands of DPs/PAPs in reflecting on it and preparing an alternative to it and to the LAQ. They presented it to the Secretary, Rural Development, in October 1995. Two years later in November 1997, the Committee of Secretaries, Government of India approved a new draft. It has many good points and shortcomings. But they do not question the main thrust of these documents that more land

acquisition is integral to liberalization. For example, the 1994 draft began by stating: 'With the advent of the New Economic Policy, it is expected that there will be large scale investments, both on account of internal generation of capital and increased inflow of foreign investments, thereby creating an enhanced demand for land to be provided within a shorter time-span in an increasingly competitive market ruled economic structure' (MRD 1994: 1.1 & 4.1).

Our studies show that the policy is taken seriously. For example, in Orissa around 40,000 ha were acquired for industries during 1951–95. The trend is to acquire around 100,000 ha for them in 10 years (Fernandes and Asif 1997: 68–70). In Andhra Pradesh, 65,000 ha were acquired for industry during these 45 years. Around half of it has been acquired during five years after 1995 (Fernandes et al. 2001: 48–49). Around 11.2 per cent of Goa's landmass is on perpetual mining leases, 38 per cent under the forest department and 4.43 per cent was acquired from 1965 (when the LAQ was made applicable) to 1995. If the future plans are implemented another 7.72 per cent of its landmass will be acquired in 10 years, though its population density was 316 in 1991 (Fernandes and Naik 1999: 76–77). Attack on mining land is great all over India since foreign companies target them.

The private sector goes where roads and railway are. So, fertile land is acquired even when alternatives are available. For example, the agitation around the Konkan Railway in Goa was not to stop it but to save the *khazan* lands, a pre-Portuguese irrigation system on which thousands of fishing families depend. Their technology and flora and fauna have not been studied. Studies on similar systems in Kuttanadu in Kerala and Gujarat show that bisecting them without drainage leads to more mosquitoes and malaria (Ecoforum 1993). Some 40,000 ha of abandoned mining land would have been available if the line was diverted. But it was built on the coast. Today, fertile land is being acquired on both sides of the line for new industries (Fernandes and Naik 1999: 74–75). In West Bengal, the land to the North of the Midnapore railway station is rocky and undulating while that near Kharagpur is fertile. But being close to the highway, 200 acres of the latter were acquired for Tata Metalliks in 1992 and 96 acres for a Birla firm that has not taken off. So, over 1,000 Lodha tribals have been sacrificed to private profit.

Taking the statement about the need to acquire more land seriously, in 1998 the Ministry of Rural Area and Employment that formulated the policy draft, also prepared the Land Acquisition (Amendments) Bill 1998 (LAB), to make acquisition for companies easier than in the past. It contradicts the policy document on most issues. While the policy recognizes the need for resettlement, LAB only puts rehabilitation in the statute book when it says that where a law exists, those entitled to it should stake claim to it. The District Collector will decide on its nature and its cost will be deducted from the compensation. The policy includes among the DPs/PAPs all those inhabiting the area three years before the first notification. LAB includes all those who own assets on the day of the notification but restricts it to *patta* owners alone. Extending it to the date of the notification helps the exploiters to spread rumours who hear about the project in advance and motivate people to sell their land by instilling fear in them. They buy the land and get the benefits meant for the DPs/PAPs. The policy speaks of replacement value for compensation. The Bill limits it to market value. It takes away the few rights the DPs/PAPS have under the LAQ. The Union Cabinet is reported to have approved it in October 1998 but rejected the policy. But under pressure from the DPs/PAPs and civil society, the Minister for Rural Development seems to have agreed to formulate a policy first and then drafting a law based on it. Today one is left with the impression that the Government is non-committal on the policy but wants to enact the LAB.

There are reasons to believe that except the Maharashtra Act, the other documents were formulated under pressure from the World Bank. When something is done under pressure, those who implement it are not committed to it. In fact, many of them have not been implemented properly (Fernandes and Paranjpye 1997: 5). Besides, these documents are in sharp contrast to the stand of the DPs/PAPs, activists and researchers who hold that they cannot be displaced without a search for non-displacing and least displacing alternatives and without the prior informed consent of those to be affected. They should be involved in the identification of the assets to be acquired, and the norms for compensation and rehabilitation. Replacement value should be the norm for compensation. The DPs/PAPs should be the first beneficiaries of the project that deprives them

of their livelihood. Their lifestyle should be better after the project than before it because they pay its price. Rehabilitation should be a fundamental right and its cost should be borne by the project.

Basic to the issue is the eminent domain called *terra nullius* (nobody's land) in Australia. White colonization of aboriginal land there and in the Americas was based on the thinking that land without an individual title belongs to none and can be occupied by anyone. In 1992, the Australian judiciary declared it unconstitutional (Brennan 1995). But it continues in India under its American version of eminent domain. Its first facet is that land without an individual *patta* is state property. The second is that the state alone has the right to define a public purpose (Ramanathan 1999). The LAQ based on it accepts public purpose as the basis of displacement. But it has not been defined. So, displacement remains arbitrary. Abuses are inevitable, a major one being acquiring more land than required and transferring it for other purposes. For example, less than a third of the 3,764 ha acquired for the HAL-MIG plant at Sunabeda, Koraput district, Orissa, in 1966 has been used till now. It has been lying vacant and its 468 predominantly tribal displaced families have not been resettled. Some of it is reportedly being sold to a private party at a high profit (Fernandes and Asif 1997). A part of the land acquired for BHEL in the Medak district of Andhra Pradesh was used for ICRISAT (Fernandes et al. 2001). Much of the land acquired for a public purpose on both sides of the Roro Irrigation canals in the Singhbhum district of Jharkhand has been transferred to relatives of project officials for a housing colony (Areeparampil 1996)—the Managing Director of the Korba Thermal Power Station has a bungalow built on 16 acres. In some cases, for example the FCI Plant at Talcher in Orissa, the township occupies up to 40 per cent of the land acquired (Fernandes and Raj 1992).

WHO ARE THE DPs/PAPs?

Who are the DPs/PAPs and why this callous attitude? Most of them are from assetless rural poor classes like landless labourers and small and marginal farmers. The tribals are estimated to be more than

40 per cent of the DPs/PAPs. Another 20 per cent are dalits. An unknown but big proportion of the rest are other rural poor. Thus mostly powerless and voiceless people are displaced without their consent and ignored (Mahapatra 1990). This callous attitude can be noticed also in the absence of long-term regional planning. A project is taken in isolation and land is acquired for it. It often results in multiple displacements. For example, many Rihand dam oustees, in MP, of the early 1960s have been displaced four times in 30 years (Ganguly Thukral 1989). The Soliga tribals in Karnataka displaced by the Kabini dam in the 1970s are threatened with displacement again by the Rajiv Gandhi National Park (Cheria 1996). Many fishing families displaced by the Mangalore Port in the 1960s and resettled as agriculturists were displaced again by the Konkan Railway in the 1980s, after they had adapted themselves to farming. The village of Chikapar in the Koraput district of Orissa has been displaced thrice in three decades (Fernandes and Raj 1992).

What it means is that the project authorities are meticulous in planning the financial and technical aspects but make little effort to get a clear idea of the people to be affected by it or to plan their resettlement. The poor are displaced and left to fend for themselves. But no compromise is made on the engineering and economic aspects. Economic growth gets priority over the people. That in itself is not surprising because most decision-makers view development primarily as economic growth. So despite the enormity of the problem they think of displacement as sad but inevitable (Rau 1990: 60). That explains the absence of a rehabilitation policy or law, though the LAQ contradicts Article 21 of the Constitution which the Apex Court has interpreted as right to a life with dignity. Besides, Article 19.1 b confers on every citizen the right to inhabit any part of the Indian territory and therefore by implication the right not to be displaced without their consent. But the LAQ allows the state to displace people without their consent and with no obligation to resettle them. Compensation does not replace the livelihood lost. So despite the Constitution, people's fundamental rights are ignored.

Equally important is the fact that clearly identifiable classes pay the price of development whose benefits reach equally identifiable classes. Besides, the tribals and dalits, and women in particular, have

relatively little exposure to the external world controlled by the formal system. Displacement pushes them into its economy and society without adequate preparation. Thus, deprival of livelihood results both in their economic deprival and socio-cultural marginalization that is a consequence of the processes set in motion by deprival. By marginalization we mean deterioration in their economic and social status and in their psychological attitudes. These changes deprive the already powerless not merely of their material resources but also of the motivation they require to improve their socio-economic status. When they are pushed into the powerful external world without adequate preparation, they internalize the value system of the dominant society and begin to consider their own society and culture of little value and are incapable of developing themselves. Such internalization makes it impossible for them to rebuild their lives, leave alone improve their lifestyle. So their material standard, social status and psychological attitudes deteriorate (Fernandes 2000: 212–13). That makes them vulnerable to exploitation and explains their ongoing dependence on the powerful. So, displacement-induced impoverishment has two facets: (*a*) economic deterioration; and (*b*) loss of the social and psychological infrastructure. National development thus becomes a process of transferring the natural and other resources of the traditional rural communities to the middle and upper classes or to the corporate sector as raw material to produce consumer articles and as a of source of profit.

THE NORTH EAST AND DEVELOPMENT

The developments in the North East have to be analyzed within this context. The region is rich in bio-diversity and natural resources. The only known explorations for minerals remain those of oil and coal, and to this list one may add uranium mining which is a sensitive issue, especially in Meghalaya where the government has begun initial surveys. This case brings out the contradictions between the eminent domain and the existing social norms in the region. While the state sees uranium as a vital component of its 'scientific nuclear project', it cannot begin mining the metal primarily because land

in Meghalaya is supposed to belong to the indigenous population. For three years the government and the people have been locked in an impossible battle, where several arguments on the issue of development have been thrown around by all concerned.

Development is a concern of all sections of the broader political spectrum in the region. Dissidents cite the lack of meaningful development as the root cause of insurgency (Baruah 1999: 40–47). In an ironic twist, both the state and the armed opposition see underdevelopment as a legitimate reason of violence. Hence the state too has a vested interest in ensuring that development takes place in the region, more so because it would take away one of the major reasons that supposedly lead to insurgency. However, without entering the nitty-gritty of the effects of the policy on extremism we shall concentrate on what this process entails for the marginalized in the region.

An important consideration in the discourse on development-induced displacement in the North East is the absence of any conclusive database since 1947. Some data are available on the displacement of large numbers in the colonial period (Jha 1996: 150) especially on the movement of people from Jharkhand to Assam as indentured labour. Data on the displacement of people due to road building and wartime construction work are available, as part of information on the colonial economic systems and the dislocation caused to the local economy (Barbora 1998: 56–60). Yet there is very little information on the displacement since the 1950s. After the Sino-Indian war of 1962, the process of associating defence sensibilities with development received sanction in the Five Year Plans. Much land was taken over for defence installations. Added to it was the relocation of villages into what was known as the 'grouping system' carried out in the 1960s in Mizoram and Nagaland, in order to cut off the supplies and support base of the rebels.

While defence related acquisition in the region is a major source of displacement, it is by no means the only one. Some projects like oil refineries and cement plants have displaced people. The tempo of displacement is increasing. In reply to a question, the then Power Minister outlined in the Rajya Sabha on 14 March 2002 plans to finalize 10 major hydroelectric dams in the region with power

potential he estimated as 58,971 KW or 38 per cent of the country's total requirement (*The Assam Tribune* 15 March 2002). Most of them are in areas inhabited by tribal groups whose lands are protected under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. As these projects are situated in areas where the population density is low, there is the danger that the relatively low figures of PAPs may be used as an argument in favour of the construction of such dams. The fact that these lands are the only sustenance of the region's indigenous tribals is ignored though it should be the main consideration.

It is so because there is no systematic manner by which project planners have addressed the issue of replacing the existing economic base. In the years to come, this itself will be a cause for great concern. The proposed dam at Tipaimukh (Manipur) has already raised several key questions with regard to compensation for traditional land. One of the concerns raised has to do with the alienation of lands that have immense symbolic value for the indigenous tribes of the region. The manner in which the local people have been denied a part in the planning process of such big 'national projects' is also a recurring concern of the indigenous peoples (Pamei 2001: 1054). This is also seen in the case of other proposed dams in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

Whatever the intricate trends in the development discourse, some facts need to be read along with the desire for a realistic model that gives the people their due. The overall resource base is heavily dependent on agriculture. Industrialization across the region has been lopsided and slow, not for lack of education. The literacy rate in the North East is among the highest, especially in Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya that have a history of missionary activity in this sector. In the primary sector we include agriculture, forestry, fisheries and mineral extraction. The secondary sector refers to industry and tertiary services that include commerce, tourism, information technology and related fields. Since fields like tourism and commerce are not really flourishing in the region, much of the tertiary sector represents employment in the administration. Employment in the secondary sector is limited. The primary sector is by far the largest area of participation of the educated workforce in the region.

In 1996, the region had 214 major and medium industries, 166 of them in Assam against 374 in the industrially 'backward' state of Orissa. The outstanding feature of the region's economy is the predominance of the primary sector. In 1996, 70–75 per cent of its workforce against an all India average of 67.53 per cent was in the primary sector that includes agriculture, forestry, fisheries and mineral extraction. The 'secondary' sector (industry) employed 3.48 to 8 per cent against 11.99 per cent in the country. Tertiary sector that includes fields like commerce, tourism and information technology is weak in much of the North East. So here it includes mostly employment in the administration. In 1996, 23.9 per cent of the Arunachal workforce, 21.46 per cent of Meghalaya, 21.26 per cent of Nagaland and 20.45 per cent of Assam was in this sector against an all India average of 20.5 per cent. The primary sector is saturated and cannot offer jobs to the educated youth. Many in the region survive on shifting cultivation. The spectre of unemploymlent is real as there is very little investment in the secondary sector and the tertiary sector is unable to expand. These conditions are the setting for an understanding of development in the region (Fernandes 2001: 90–94).

CONCLUSION

The above data and analysis points to impoverishment and marginalization. The process began in the colonial age and got intensified after independence. The colonial times witnessed some struggles against displacement, the best known among them being the one of Mulshi-Peta near Pune in the 1920s. The freedom fighters joined this struggle and opposed the British on this issue. But they had themselves internalized the colonial value system including that of the eminent domain. So when they became the rulers, they used the same colonial legislation to displace people in the name of national development. As a result, there has been more displacement and struggles after independence, the one against Sardar Sarovar being the best known. Their common theme is the right of the poor to a life with dignity and rejection of projects that displace them without their consent and impoverish and marginalize them. Thus, it is

a demand for another type of development that is expressed in different ways by the fish workers' struggle in the coastal areas, the forest dwellers' right to their sustenance and the fight against globalization.

The same situation exists in the North East. A holistic picture of what actually constitutes the rights of displaced persons in the region has to be seen along with the issue of existing development paradigms and the impact that they have had on the social structure in the region. An approach that puts people first is the challenge of peace with justice.

NOTES

1. This paper is adapted from the Keynote address at the seminar on displacement in the Barak Valley, Assam University, Silchar, delivered by the first author on 27 March 2002.
2. The report on West Bengal has by now been prepared.
3. The paper was written before the Government of India announced its Resettlement & Rehabilitation (R&R) Policy in early 2005.

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About the Editor and Contributors

THE EDITOR

Samir Kumar Das is Professor of Political Science at the University of Calcutta, Kolkata. A Postdoctoral Fellow (2005) of Social Science Research Council (South Asia Programme), he is also the Deputy Coordinator of UGC–DRS Programme on 'Democratic Governance in Indian States'. Prior to joining the University, he was on the faculty of the Department of Political Science, Presidency College, Kolkata. He specializes in and writes on issues of ethnicity, security, migration, rights and justice. His publications include *Ethnicity, Nation and Security: Essays on Northeastern India* (2004), *Regionalism in Power* (1998) and *ULFA—A Political Analysis* (1994). He has edited *South Asian Peace Studies II: Peace Accords and Peace Processes* (2005) and co-edited *Autonomy—Beyond Kant and Hermeneutics* (2007), *Indian Autonomies: Keywords and Key Texts* (2005) and *Internal Displacement in South Asia: Relevance of UN Guiding Principles* (2004).

THE CONTRIBUTORS

Malaya Banerjee, MBB College, Agartala, Tripura (West).

Sanjay Barbora, Panos South Asia, Guwahati Office and formerly a Research Associate, North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati, Assam.

Subhash Barman, Lecturer in History, Goalpara College, Goalpara, Assam.

Chandrika Basu Majumder, Department of Political Science, Tripura University, Tripura.

M. C. Behera, Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar Arunachal Pradesh.

Bornali Bhattacharjee, Lecturer, Department of Political Science, S. K. Roy College, Katlicherra, Hailakandi (Assam).

Subir Bhaumik, Chief of Bureau, Eastern India, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Kolkata.

Biswajit Chakrabarty, Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, Guwahati.

Mahadev Chakravarti, Mahatma Gandhi Professor of History, Tripura University, Agartala, Tripura.

Baneswar Das, Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam.

Sukhendu Debbarma, Reader, Department of History, Tripura University, Agartala, Tripura.

Ksh. Bimola Devi, Professor, Department of Political Science, Manipur University, Manipur.

Sristidhar Dutta, Department of History, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.

Walter Fernandes, Director, North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati.

K. Gailangam, Project Officer, ACEE, Manipur University, Manipur.

Aparna Goswami, Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam.

Uddipana Goswami, Formerly with Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata.

Monirul Hussain, Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, Guwahati.

Nazmin Banu Islam, Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam.

Jyotirmay Jana, Department of English, Nowgong Girls College, Nowgong, Assam.

Makiko Kimura, Research Fellow (PD), Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Tokyo, Japan. Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

P. K. Mandal, Department of Economics, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.

Deepak Mishra, Department of Economics, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.

Abdul Mannan Mazumdar, Department of Political Science, S.S. College, Hailakandi (Assam).

P. K. Panigrahi, Reader, Department of Political Science, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.

Satyadeo Poddar, Professor, Department of History, Tripura University,Tripura.

Timo Riba, Senior Lecturer, Department of Geography, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.

Ruma Sahu, Department of Economics, M.B.B. College, Agartala, Tripura.

K. O. Sebastian, Department of History, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.

Koijam Shethajit, Department of Political Science, Manipur University, Manipur.

Tana Showren, Department of History, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar Arunachal Pradesh.

Sudhir Kumar Singh, Reader, Department of History, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.

L. Leiren Singh, Head, Department of Education, Manipur University, Imphal, Manipur.

S. Mangi Singh, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Manipur University, Imphal, Manipur.

R. K. Ranjan Singh, Registrar, Manipur University, Imphal, Manipur.

Amitabha Sinha, Reader, Department of Analytical and Applied Economics, Tripura University, Tripura.

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